

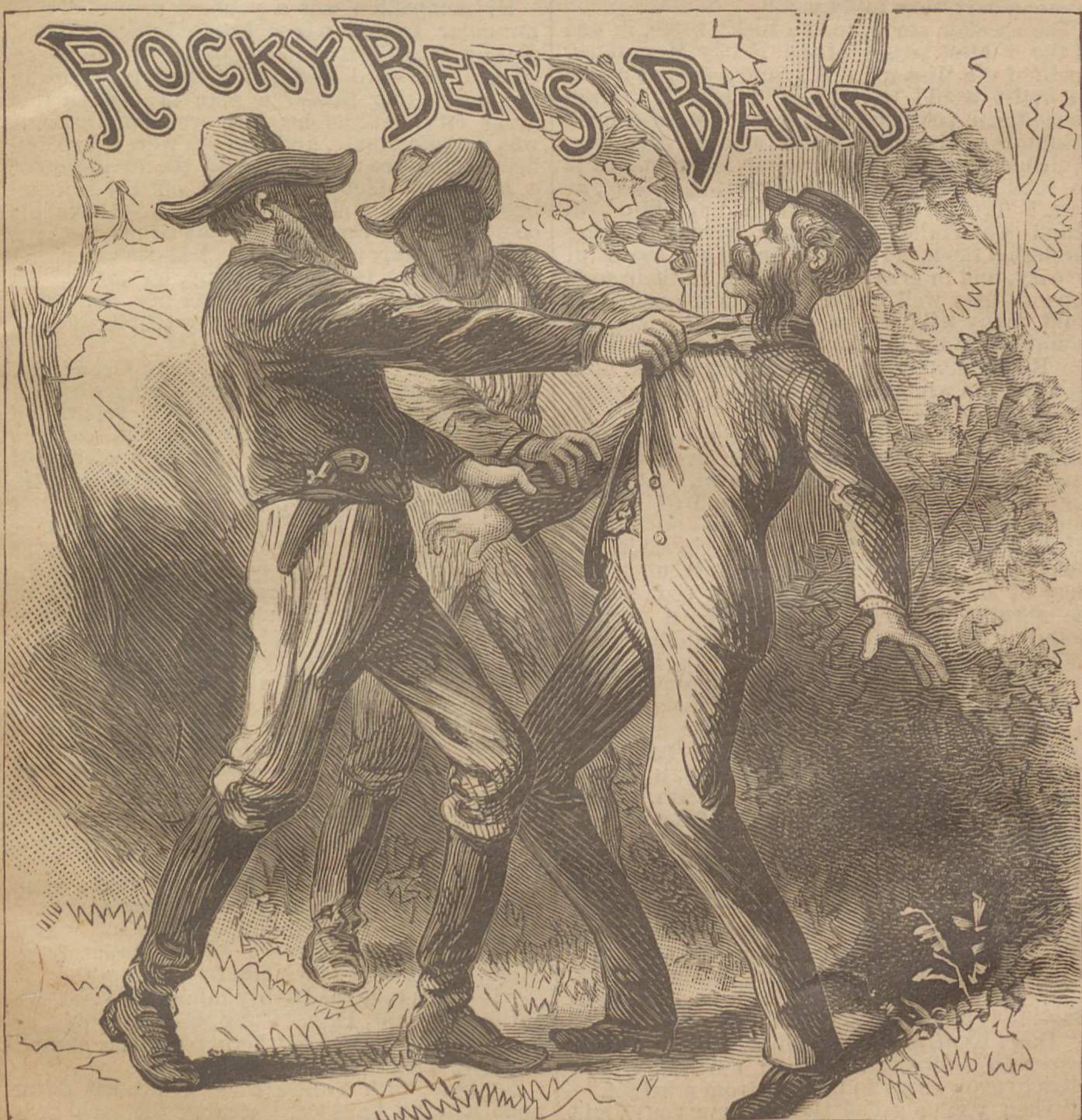
BEADLE'S POCKET Library

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FEATHERBY FOUND HIMSELF CONFRONTED BY TWO MEN, CLOSELY MASKED, WHO
AT ONCE SEIZED HIM,

Rocky Ben's Band;

OR,

BIG PETE'S BIG HAUL.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,
AUTHOR OF "MAD TOM WESTERN," "SINGLE
HAND," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILD MAN OF THE HILLS.

"LOOK out, you painter critter!" cried a rough voice, "unlest you want to tumble down into the gulch. By mighty snakes, ef you was to fall, thar wouldn't be enough of you left to grease a cart, now mind you."

The speaker stood upon a rocky ledge, in one of the wildest passes of the Rocky Mountains, north of the Missouri. A grand scene, at which an artist would have been delighted. High above them, peak on peak, rose the snow-capped mountains, gleaming white against the sky. Well has a distinguished writer said, "there is no such country on earth, I verily believe, as ours." Truly, we are rich in mountains, in grand waterfalls, in mighty rivers flowing through a thousand miles of grand and beautiful scenery, and in great lakes, which in their wide expanse may well claim the title of seas. But amid many wild scenes, not the Alps or any mountain range in Europe can compare with the Rocky Mountains, upon whose peaks, high up amid the winter snow, Fremont set the glittering flag of the Republic.

Two men stood together upon the ledge, looking with admiration and wonder at the grand panorama spread out before them. At their very feet yawned a gulf, five hundred feet in depth, the sides covered with vines and stunted shrubs springing out from every crevice in the rocks, and clinging to jutting points upon the faces of the cliffs or twining about the roots of the shrubbery. Deep at the base, a narrow mountain stream ran swiftly on, bubbling over the huge stones in its channels, whirling in eccentric circles, and dropping with a musical sound from rock to rock. Yet, small and insignificant as this little stream was, it was the source of one of the mighty rivers of the West, taking in tributaries as it flowed onward, until, upon the great prairie, it swept on a vast stream, to join its volume to the "father of waters," the mighty Mississippi.

Before them lay the great plain, dotted here and there with clumps of timber, and permeated by many silver streams, all bending toward the great stream to which they were tributary. It was summer, and the short prairie-grass was gently waving in the passing breeze, giving the looker-on the idea of a vast sea, restless as that unquiet flood.

"Don't be afraid of my falling, Pete," replied the person addressed. "I am too much of a sailor to grow dizzy in looking from a height."

"Then you've sailed the sea, hev you?" said the first speaker. "It's a strange thing to me thet a man of sense should trust his life a thou-

sand miles from land, an' nuthin' but a plank to keep out the water. Now, look yer; water is a good enuff thing to drink, ef so be ye kain't git a morsel of whisky to give it countenance, so to speak, but it ain't *my* style to travel on, and that's a fact."

He was a large, sinewy, muscular, hard-featured man, in the garb of a mountaineer and trapper, a fringed hunting-shirt and leggins, moccasins and beaver cap comprising his dress. Of course he wore a belt, sustaining a heavy hatchet, and in the breast-pocket of his hunting-shirt was a suspicious-looking protuberance, telling of the hidden revolver, a terrible weapon in experienced hands, in a close combat. A rifle of the "Sharpe" patent rested in the hollow of his arm, his fingers closing protectingly across the lock, while a powder-flask and bullet-pouch completed his equipments.

His companion was a younger person, also of muscular frame, whose bronzed face showed plainly, that although a gentleman in every sense of the word, he had not spent his youth in the enervating life of a man of fashion in a great city. While his face was handsome, it was not effeminate, and his eyes were sharp and firm. He wore no beard, with the exception of a heavy mustache, which set off his sun-browned face well. He was armed like his companion in every respect, but suspended by a green cord thrown over the left shoulder and passed across to the right hip, he carried an artist's portfolio, which he was now detaching from its support, with his eye still fixed upon the grand scene before him.

This second person was Ethelbert Grandison, artist, naturalist and traveler—a man who, under another name, has earned a reputation which is world wide, and which has won for him the gold medal of the learned societies of London and Paris. He had been a traveler from boyhood, and though but thirty years of age, had hunted the elephant in the midst of wild African scenery, the tiger in the jungles of Asia, and the grizzly bear in his mountain home. Free of heart, ready of hand, bold in the hour of danger, and, withal, modest as a girl in relation to his exploits, he was a favorite with all, and was already beloved by the mountain-men and trappers with whom he had become acquainted.

"What ar' you a-goin' to do now, you born devil?" said the mountaineer, with a grin. "You don't tell me you ar' gwine to roost on this yer' rock, and make a picter of it?"

"That is a remarkable instance of penetration on your part, my big friend," replied the artist, with a smile.

"I s'pose you'd squat thar and make your picter ef a grizzly b'ar should happen along," suggested Big Pete, in high dudgeon. "You don't happen to know we ar' ten miles from camp, and it ain't two hours from sunset?"

"It won't take me twenty minutes to get the outlines, I want, Pete. Come, be reasonable, as you *can* be. I came out here to sketch as well as hunt, and I must do it."

Big Pete, with a dissatisfied grunt, sat down upon a small boulder, watching the rapid pencil of the artist, as he transferred the outlines of the beautiful scene to his portfolio. It was dull

work for the mountaineer, who had nature's book before him; so he rose, after awhile, and strolled down a narrow path which led toward the bottom of the gulch, telling Grandison to whistle when he wanted him. The artist worked steadily, oblivious to every thing except the scenery before him, and had nearly finished the outlines of his sketch, when a startled cry from below called his attention, and, flinging down his book, he unslung his rifle and was changed instantly from the artist to the hunter, his eyes blazing with the hunter's fire. The sound of rushing feet was heard, and Big Pete appeared, dashing up the mountain-path at a speed which terror only could inspire. His brown face had turned to a sickly white, and he looked wildly behind him, as if expecting pursuit.

"What is the matter, Pete? Speak quick!"

"Don't stop to talk, but *git*; that's the word, *git*!"

Satisfied that no common danger could have shaken the nerve of the bravest among the mountain-men, Big Pete Burns, who went into a fight with Indian or grizzly with a desperate courage which few men could equal, Ethelbert hastily slung his portfolio over his shoulder and followed his companion down the mountain-path.

"Thar he is, *thar*," screamed Pete. "But thank fortin he ain't arter us!"

"Who is it? What is it? I'm not going to run any further until I understand what I am running from," cried Ethelbert, halting.

"Look thar!" replied the big guide.

Following the extended finger of the mountaineer with a rapid glance, the artist gazed down into the gulch, and there, springing from rock to rock in the foaming channel, he saw a strange figure, which from time to time gave a hideous laugh, which sent a thrill through the strong nerves even of the young traveler—a gigantic figure covered from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot with shaggy hair, with long, powerful limbs and broad shoulders, holding in his right hand a heavy club which none but a giant could wield—a being the prototype of which the naturalist had never seen. It was larger than either of the men, and seemed nothing mortal, and the laugh was like the scream of the panther.

"What horrible thing is this?" cried Ethelbert, turning to his companion, who was in mortal terror.

"I'll tell you what it is," replied Pete. "It's nyther more nor less than the 'Wild Man of the Hills.' *That's* what it is."

"And who or what is the Wild Man of the Hills?" demanded Grandison.

"I reckon you've got me thar, boss," replied Pete, still gazing after the figure of the wild being.

As he spoke he saw the creature plant the end of the club he carried upon a rock, swing himself around a jutting cliff, and disappear.

"Thar, he's gone. I ain't been skeered so sence my mother fu'st spanked me. I reckon we'd better git out our hosses, and when we ar' on the road I'll tell you all I know of the critter they call the 'Wild Man of the Hills.'"

They hurried down the mountain together,

but it was over an hour before they reached the foothills, among which their horses had been concealed. They found them as they had been left, tethered in a little sheltered glade, kept from straying by the long lariat fastened to a peg driven into the ground. Mounting their horses, the two headed them toward the plain.

"Now, then, Pete," said the artist, impatiently; "tell me about this strange being."

"It's over two years sence he was fu'st seen in this yer region, and it's bin a bad time fer us, you bet! The boys say, and I'm afeard it's true, that he ain't no ways mortal, and I sort o' reckon it's true. Anyhow, it's bad luck fer a man, be he white, black or red, to meet the Wild Man in the hills."

"How so?"

"I kain't say how, you understand, but ef a man meets him he's sart'in to see a dead body afore the day is gone, and, mou't be, his own body will lay dead in the tangled grass, with his skull smashed like an egg-shell."

"That is sheer superstition, Pete. I cannot believe it."

"All right," replied Pete, in a sulky tone.

"I'm a liar, then, that's all—a durned outrageous liar. I reckon you'd better choose yer words a little better, or I'll raise yer ha'r."

"I am not going to quarrel with you, Pete, and am far from doubting your word; but, do you know this of your own knowledge or by hearsay evidence?"

"Ain't I *seen* it done? Didn't I find Bob Frazee, from Middle Gap, with his head pounded ez soft ez a b'iled potater, the same day Tom Cristy seen the Wild Man? To be sure, Bob Frazee was a most owdashus vill'in, and ef we'd 'a' caught him he'd 'a' bin strung up by the neck, but that's all the same. And didn't I see the Wild Man onc't afore, in Dead Man's Gulch, and afore night we found a stranger dead in the Gulch killed the same way?"

"Umph! This is certainly remarkable, and only goes to prove that this strange creature takes delight in slaying men."

"Yes, and that ain't all. Every one I ever see dead, or hearn tell of, was a rascal of the wu'st kind. The critter seems to take pleasure in rubbin' out the off-scurin's of the mount'ins; it's a queer thing."

At this moment, as they were riding at a brisk trot by the mouth of the canyon, the horse which Ethelbert rode, a spirited animal, shied with such violence that the young artist, although a consummate horseman, very nearly lost his saddle, and kept it only by a powerful effort. By this time, Big Pete had recovered from the scare which the appearance of the Wild Man had given him, and, though his own trained mustang was plunging violently, he turned his head toward the canyon, drawing his revolver as he did so. Mastering his horse, the young artist followed, and found the horse of the trapper with his fore-legs rigid as iron bars, half-sitting upon his haunches, and resolutely refusing to advance, although his flanks were gored by the long Mexican spurs worn by the old guide. Pete now leaped out of the saddle and ran forward, when he suddenly recoiled with a low cry of horror. Grandison tied his lariat to a point of rock and joined him, and

saw what it was which had so alarmed the horses.

Upon the bare rocks, just beyond the point, lay the body of a man of the mountains, dressed in buckskin, with a black belt about his waist in which hung a heavy knife and pistols.

"A Greaser," said Pete, giving the name by which the Mexicans are known among mountain-men. "What did I tell you, boss? Now say I'm a liar! Now tell me that it don't mean anything to meet the Wild Man in the hills, will you?"

"It is plain that this terrible creature has slain the man," replied the artist, "and if I am any judge of faces, this dead man must rank with those whom you know to have been slain. He was not a good man, at best."

"Good man? Phew; git out! How you talk! Who ever hern tell of a good or true Greaser, say?"

"I have, many a one. But let that pass. How shall we dig a grave for him?"

"I don't see no use of it, but ef you ar' sot on it, I'll show ye how to do it without the trouble of diggin' a hole; though I don't take kindly to it, and nyther would you ef you'd 'a' stood what I hev from them Greasers."

By the sides of the stream were many crevices of various sizes and depths, and in one of these, out of the reach of buzzards or prowling beasts, they laid the dead man down to rest. Over the body they piled a heap of stones picked up from the floor of the canyon, and then left him to his long sleep, beside the dancing water. The two men, with sober faces, dashed across the river and rode hard over the prairie, through the short grass, never slackening rein until they saw in the gathering gloom before them—for darkness was coming on—a camp-fire gleaming brightly.

"Now, cuss all obstinit fools," muttered the big guide. "What call had they to build a fire like that? I'll bet you two and a half cents that's the work of that darned chap you brought out with you."

"Whoever it is, he is much to blame, knowing the danger he brings upon us all."

"Who comes thar?" cried a voice from a clump of bushes. "Speak, unless you want to git rubbed out right smart."

"Grandison and Big Pete," replied Burns.

"All right, Pete," replied the same voice. "Come along quick, fer I want you."

CHAPTER II.

FEATHERBY'S NIGHT-CAP.

THE camp in which the fire blazed was situated upon the bank of the stream, and, although the trees upon the opposite bank shielded it from the view of persons upon that side of the current, it was plainly visible from that part of the prairie from which Ethelbert and the guide approached. Two or three men in the garb of hunters and trappers were lounging upon the grass, smoking pipes cut from the root of the sweet-brier, and a fourth person was crouching over the blaze, puffing industriously at a large meerschaum. This man was a strange figure to find upon the Western plains, and was evidently regarded with little favor by the company. He was dressed in an English

shooting-costume, a short "cut-away" coat and pants, and wore a marvelously small cap perched upon the summit of his cranium.

"Aw, Bertie, old fellah, glad you've come in! if I ain't, demmel! Where have you kept yourself all day?"

"Confound it, man, what do you mean by building such a fire as that in an Indian country?" replied Ethelbert.

"Fiah? You don't suppose I'm going to catch cold on account of a few coppah-colahed Indians, do you? I didn't think that of you, Bertie Grandison."

"You'll git yer ha'r raised, *you* will!" growled Pete Burns, as he kicked the blazing brands into the river. "Durn me fur a red-skin ef you don't deserve it, too. Why, blame my cats, Neddy, what did you let him make such a blaze fur?"

"He would do it, Pete," grumbled the man who had met them, a burly, thick-set fellow, in a greasy hunting-shirt and leggins. "I told the blamed idiot to quit, but jest so soon as my back was turned he'd rake up the coals again, and pile on more wood. Here, you, stranger, you put that wood down, or I'll bu'st you right in the jaw, you bet high on it."

"Why, yah low dem'd scoundrel, what do yah mean?" said the exquisite, rising. "I'd have you understand that I am a man of education; I speak five languages, sah!"

"You don't!" said Pete Burns. "Then I'd hev *you* understand thet out hyar on the pra'ry we only speak *one* language, and *durned little* of that!"

"You talk mighty big, stranger, you do!" said the man called Neddy, "and I'd give you to know that Neddy Forrester is a tough colt to hit, he is, and would think no more of giving you a back-handed sweep that'd wipe you off the face of the immortal world than he would of pickin' the marrer-bone of a buffler."

"Silence all!" cried Ethelbert, sternly. "You men, be more respectful to my friend, Mr. Featherby, and I will answer for it that he will not trouble you. As for you, Oscar Featherby, if you cannot conform to the rules of the prairie, upon keeping which our safety depends, the quicker you get back to one of the forts the better for all concerned."

"You talk as if I didn't know anything, Bertie," replied Featherby, in an angry tone. "I've paraded some of our fellahs in London at twelve paces for saying less than that."

"Nonsense! You don't want to fight any more than I do, Mr. Featherby, and ought to know better than to build a fire in an open prairie. It's the hunting season, and many savages are on the plains, and it is impossible to say what may happen."

"The Injins won't trouble us hyar jest now," said Pete. "'Tain't them I'm afraid of so much as Rocky Ben."

"Rocky Ben?"

"Ay, Rocky Ben. You don't happen to know the durned critter as well as I do. What ef I tell you that in yonder mountains, som'ers, thar's a band o' men who kin more that ekal the Black-feet in deviltry—men alongside of whom Red Wing, the Sioux, is a born angel, and the Pawnees saints."

"Look heah, you chap," said Featherby. "Don't talk that way; it's foolish, you know."

"No, I don't know, nyther. Never mind, if Rocky Ben ketches you, e'll let you know whether it's so or not! But build yer fire, build yer fire, and bring 'em down on us."

Featherby's courage, like that of Bob Acres, began to "ooze out of his palms."

"It's ridiculous for a man like me to come into this heathen country; oh, dem it! I don't want to build a fiah if you don't think it best. Say, Bertie, let's go back. We've seen enough of this dem'd country, you know."

"You said one durned true thing, stranger," said Neddy, with a grin. "It is rediculous, durned rediculous, fur a man like you to come out hyar. That Rocky Ben would eat you up at a mouthful, but I don't think he'd relish the meal."

"Hold up," said Pete, suddenly striking his hand upon his knee. "Rocky Ben ain't fur off, and I've seen one of his men to-day."

"Whar?" demanded Ned, uneasily.

"He won't trouble, anyhow," said Pete, and drawing closer to his companion, he related the story of the meeting with the Wild Man, and afterward the finding the dead body of the Mexican in the pass. "The Greaser wore a black belt with a steel buckle, and hyar it is," said Pete, holding up the belt which he had taken from the body of the slain man. "Now, look at this sign on the buckle—a bird flying upward. That's the sign of Rocky Ben, King of the Mountains."

"And who is Rocky Ben?" demanded Ethelbert, taking the belt.

"He's a heathen Philistine, a red-handed murderer, that hez ha'nted the hills fur three year and more—a born thief, that steals by line and level, as the sayin' is. Hosses, traps, peltries, guns; everything's fish that comes to his net."

"Did any of you ever see him?"

All answered in the negative.

"Then you do not know what he is like?"

"Nary time."

"Does he meddle with peaceful parties like this?"

"Meddle with 'em? Rather; you bet! He don't keer to kill people off unlest they happen to see his face, and if they do, they git rubbed out. I was in a party that he robbed onc't, when we was trapping forty miles north of this, on the North Red. Thar was five of us together, and he cum down on us with twenty men, every durned one masked, and had us afore we could say 'boo!' He stole everything, hosses, traps, pelts and shooters, 'ceptin' one old gun that he left with us so that we mou't git somethin' to eat. When they went away one of 'em turned back and told me to charge it to Rocky Ben, and come to Dead Man's Gulch any time and he'd pay me. I sort o' reckon I didn't come, and I ain't got my pay. But, if *that* Bird ever comes in reach of *my* rifle, he'll suffer. He done me another injury onc't, and I ain't forgot it."

"What was that?"

"I don't keer to talk of it. I'm a rough borderman, and fur me to talk of love, and that sort, to you, would make you laugh, perhaps. It was about a woman, and I reckon the'r' at

the bottom of half the quarrels, all the world over."

"I believe you are right in that, Pete. But come; let us see to the safety of our camp, and then get something to eat. Who is on guard to-night?"

"I am," said one of the hunters, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "Unless that long chap means to take his turn."

The "long chap" referred to was the fascinating Featherby, who looked daggers at the rough-spoken borderman.

"These men don't seem to have any ideah of the fitness of things, Bertie," he said. "The ideah, that I, the Honorable Oscar Flint Featherby, should stand guard like a common sojer! Atwocious!"

"Don't trouble yourself, Featherby," replied Grandison. "No one is going to trust the safety of the camp to your watchful care, you may depend, so say no more about it. Watkins, you must keep a sharpeye out, for if this bloody Bird is near it is not safe to sleep a moment. Who relieves you on guard?"

"Sartou, the Frenchman."

"Very good. You had better take your station; and let me again caution you to be watchful, and give the alarm if any danger comes near. Do not fire unless it is absolutely necessary, for the report of a rifle might guide our enemies upon us."

Watkins rose, took up his rifle and looked closely at the lock, and walked out of the camp to the edge of the little grove, where the guard was stationed. Featherby now began to open a large valise which lay upon the ground beside him, from which he took a number of toilet articles, a tooth-brush and cup among others. Into the cup he poured some fragrant substance from a bottle, and began to scrub his teeth vigorously, while the guides looked on in silent disdain, as Ethelbert and Pete made a hasty meal upon some cold venison and crackers, for they did not care to light a fire. Featherby was a slip from an honorable English family, who, fired by the adventures which the young traveler had narrated, at their dinners in London, had given him no rest until he had agreed to make him a companion on a trip to the prairies of the West. The party of scouts and guides selected by Ethelbert despised him as much as they respected the former, and only refrained from an open quarrel with him for the sake of their employer, who had won their hearts by manly and gallant conduct upon many occasions.

They had now been out six weeks hunting and exploring, and Ethelbert's portfolio was full of magnificent sketches of mountain scenery, and he had sent to the fort a number of specimens of rare plants, animals and geological wonders. Featherby looked askance at him as he took the ribs of venison in his fingers, and ate with a keen appetite, and evidently thought that there was a marked difference between Ethelbert Grandison in London and the same person on the prairie. Having cleansed his teeth, he took out from the valise something which brought a roar of laughter from the guides, and even Ethelbert could not refrain from a smile.

It was a *night-cap*! Think of that, hunters of

the West! As they began to laugh he turned angrily upon them.

"What are yah laufing at, men?"

"A night-cap, by mighty!" roared Neddy Forrester. "That beats nothing all to pieces. He orter hev a piller, by gracious! I'd like to know what in thunder he come out here for without any of the conveniences of life?"

"Let him alone, Neddy," interposed the artist, restraining his own laughter, with an effort. "If he likes to wear a night-cap, let him."

"Allow me to ask if yah see anything wrong in this night-cap as a night-cap, Mistah Grandison?" demanded the irate Englishman.

"Nothing whatever," replied Ethelbert. "As a night-cap, it is a decided success. Let us say no more about it, but try and get some sleep, for in the morning I have a plan to work out which will give us plenty to do."

They wrapped their blankets about them, and lay down upon the fragrant grass. The moon rose slowly in the clear sky, and looked down upon the sleeping camp. There they lay, sleeping as soundly as though no thought of danger was near them, and oblivious to all things without.

When the night was half gone, Watkins came gliding into camp with silent tread, and aroused the Frenchman, Sartou, who rose quietly, took his rifle and disappeared, while Watkins took his blanket and lay down with the rest.

Another hour passed, and at the time when their senses were most closely wrapped in slumber, there came pealing on the clear air of night a frightful cry—so loud, so long, so full of fierce intent, that every man was on his feet with a bound, grasping his ready rifle, while they waited for the expected rush of the savages which they thought at hand. But after that wild cry, nothing was heard except the wailing of the night wind through the trees.

CHAPTER III.

IN DANGER OF BEN.

"SARTOU!" cried Grandison, bending forward in the direction of the place where the man stood on guard.

No voice replied, and parting the bushes, the young man darted to the place where he had stood, and saw a dark object lying at the foot of a tree. To rush forward, followed by the bordermen, was his first thought, and they saw it was Sartou, the Frenchman, *dead*. They lifted the body silently and carried it into the camp, upon which a great hush had fallen since they had stood so suddenly in the presence of death. They laid him gently down.

We have said but little of Sartou, for he was a taciturn, retiring man, of a dark and moody nature, who had taken no part in the conversation about the camp-fire that night. Grandison had found him at Leavenworth, after he had engaged the other men, and had taken him because he claimed to have a perfect knowledge of a section not so well known to the other guides. And since he had come out, they had not learned to like him any better, for he had kept himself apart from all the rest, and had a sly, suspicious look at times upon his dark face.

How he had been slain was not a mystery, for

he had received a terrible blow from some heavy weapon, which had fractured his skull. His hands were firmly clinched, and in one of them he held something at which the artist looked with a cry of surprise.

What was it?

A powerful rocket, such as is used in signaling on land!

A doubt arose in the mind of the young traveler, and he called Pete Burns to look at the article.

"Immortal snakes! what's that fur, boss?"

"That is what I do not understand. Sartou evidently had this in his hand, for what purpose I am at a loss to judge, when he was stricken down so suddenly. It would seem that he meant to signal some one with this rocket."

"It's durned queer he should keep it hid from us," said Pete, in a musing tone. "I don't know nothin' about the man, but this looks mighty skeery. Wal, let's dig a hole fur him."

"See what he has in his pockets before we bury him. If there is anything of value, it had better be returned to his friends."

"Nobody knowed him at the fort," said Peter, as he began to turn the pockets inside out. There was little in them of value, but happening to touch his side, he felt there a hard substance; and opening his hunting-shirt, found that the hard substance was underneath the woolen shirt worn next the skin.

"Thar's a pocket here," muttered the guide, unbuttoning the shirt. He thrust his hand in, touching the naked skin of the yet warm body, and drew out two more rockets of the same make as the one they had found, a pocketbook of sheep-skin evidently well filled, and a crumpled paper. He laid the three before the artist, who opened the paper and read by the light of a match of wax these words:

"When they sleep, and you are on the watch, send up a blue rocket. If they are suspicious, send up a red. If other company joins them, the yellow. B."

"This begins to look ominous," said the artist, taking up the pocketbook. In it he found bills and gold to the amount of ever eight hundred dollars.

Here was proof positive. Sartou had pleaded for a position with them on the ground that his money had been won from him unfairly in a game of cards and that he was entirely destitute. It was plain that this was false, and that he had attached himself to the party for some other purpose, probably not a good one. Who was "B," and why had the signal rockets been given to the dead man?

"We are hemmed in by mysteries," said the young artist. "Here is a man who professed to be poor, carrying upon his person a large sum in notes and current bills, and keeping hidden both this fact and the one that he had these signal rockets concealed. He is silent and non-committal, has but little sympathy with us, and died with this signal in his hand. The question is whom did he design to call, and was he a good or bad man?"

"A durned outrageous bad 'un, sir," said the man called Neddy. "Look hyar."

Below the hunting-shirt of the dead man he had found a black belt, closely encircling the body, and upon the silver buckle was engraved

the bird flying upward, the sign of Rocky Ben, King o' the Mountains!

"That's it!" muttered Pete. "They ar' round about us as thick as fleas. That bloody rip Rocky Ben hez got his eye on this party and means to rob us."

"Where do you think he is?"

"Somewhar on the river, waitin' fur the signal. He sot this Frenchman on us, I'll bet my life. Of course that 'B' stands for 'Bird.' What d'ye think of that?"

"It looks reasonable, certainly. That being the case, the quicker we get out of this the better for us, for I don't propose to remain here and become the prey of that buzzard Bird or any other mountain robber. If they can hide, so can we, and doubtless there are many places in these mountains which even they know nothing of. Is it not so?"

"I reckon."

"Then let us first bury this dead scoundrel, not so much for him, but that his friend and leader may not know that he is slain."

"That's good talk, boss. Yaas, let's *plant* the durned skunk."

With this feeling remark, the guide, assisted by Neddy and Watkins, proceeded to dig a hole in the soft earth of the prairie, and wrapping the body in a blanket, they covered it with loose earth and built a fire above it, to hide the signs, knowing that they were watched by an enemy who knew just where to look for them.

During this exciting scene no one had even thought of Featherby, and when they turned to look for him, he was nowhere to be seen!

"That blamed fool hev absquatulated," said Pete. "I hope to gracious that the Wild Man has gobbled him up."

"He wur hyar, five minutes ago," replied Neddy Forrester. "Hi, *you*; Featherbed!"

"Featherby!" cried Grandison. "Where are you?"

"Featherbed, *you*; hi!" growled Pete.

But Featherby, *alias* Featherbed, made no sign.

"He's made his lucky, I guess," said Pete. "Whar in thunder could he hev gone? Git a chunk and light it. Wal, I ain't got no special good will fur the critter, and I do think thet he orter hev his head broke, but I don't want to see him snatched by a red. Hyar, you! Feathbed; hi!"

But, Featherby was mute, even if he heard their voices. Watkins took a blazing brand from the fire and walked along by the bank of the river followed by the rest. They reached a marshy place filled with dark stagnant water and mud almost liquid, when there was a cry of surprise and delight from Pete, as he saw the peaked night-cap of Featherby protruding from the soil. The exquisite heard the yell which attended the death of Sartou, and, thinking that the whole tribe of the Blackfeet was upon him, he instantly sought safety in flight. In his blind haste he had tumbled headlong into this slimy pool, and while struggling to obtain a footing, he got his feet upon a projecting root, and there remained, up to his neck in mud and water. Aristocratic though he was, he preferred the shelter of this stagnant pool to the doubtful safety of dry land.

"Ha!" roared Pete. "No catchee, no habee!"

"Oh, good Mistah Indian, help me. Don't scalp me—I'm helpless!" roared the cockney.

"Featherbed," said Pete, "I've half a mind to drown'd you."

"Oh, it is you, eh? Didn't know I was making believe, did yah?" said Featherby.

"Nyther did you, Featherbed," replied Pete. "Oh, say, don't try to come them games over us natives, 'cause ef you do, I'll raise yer ha'r right off yer head, yas, I will."

"Help me out," said Featherby.

"Help yerself; you're welcome! I've got a prejudice ag'in' helpin' them that won't help themselves."

A rope was thrown to the unfortunate dandy, and he was dragged by main force from his unpleasant position, amid the delighted chuckles of the trappers.

"Had a night-cap, *he* did," said Neddy.

"Now he's got a night-gown. Featherbed, hi! come out of that!"

So speaking, they tugged at the rope, and the body of Featherby was dragged further out of the water. He rose, with the water dripping from every point of his body, and eel-grass and slimy leaves hanging about him, and a coat of mud from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot.

"Now ain't this wediculous, Grandison," said he. "Who evah heard of such a dweadful *con-twetemps*?"

"Never heard it called that afore, Featherbed," said Pete.

"How daah you call me Featherbed, sah?"

"Ain't that yer name, stranger?"

"Featherby—b y-by, by."

"All right, Featherby-b-y-by. I think Featherbed is more soothin', don't you? 'Tenny-rate, you'd like to git into one. How did you git in that mash?" (marsh.)

"I fell in, sah," replied Featherby, wrathfully. "I thought you could see that."

"Wal, I sorter begin to realize it, Featherby-b-y-by," said Pete, grinning. "But I should judge thet a man that's so pesky keerful of his good close orter chose a cleaner place, though I don't reckon you had much time to pick."

"You see, Grandison," said Featherby, turning his back upon the guide, "I heard the Indians when they made the attack, and I thought I'd go round behind, and attack 'em in the reah, while you took 'em in front; see the point?"

"Yes," said Grandison, dryly. "I see it. Only, unfortunately for your theory, we were not attacked by Indians."

"Hey?"

"We were not assailed at all. Sartou is killed, but, upon searching his body, we find that he joined us only to betray us, and whoever killed him did a good deed, as he was on the point of sending up a rocket to bring the enemy upon us. But come; we have no time to waste, as we must change our camp immediately."

"Change our camp? Why?"

"We are in danger from the robber band of Rocky Ben, and he knows where we are."

"Good gwacious! You don't mean that, do yah? I don't like the ideah."

"I don't suppose you do, but we did not intend to consult you on the subject. Are your

rifle and pistols loaded, Featherby?" demanded Ethelbert.

"Yes."

"Then mount and keep silent. Pete, take the lead and be careful."

And forming in Indian file, they turned toward the hills.

CHAPTER IV.

BIG PETE'S PROMISE.

THE moon had gone down, and except for the intimate knowledge of the prairie which the guide possessed, they would have been as sorely tried to find their way as mariners upon a limitless sea, without a compass to guide them on their way. Even the cockney felt the necessity of caution, and refrained from the use of his tongue. Talkative as the trappers can be at the camp-fire when there is no need of caution, they can be as silent as the Indian on the war-path when occasion requires, and they showed this quality now. Even the horses seemed to share the sense of danger showed by their masters, and trod on with cautious steps. Suddenly Pete, who still led the party, halted his horses with a rapid hand, and rode back to the side of Grandison, whispering to them all as he passed to change their course, and follow him. Featherby would have spoken, but Pete clasped his hand upon his mouth with a menacing gesture, and he remained silent. After riding a hundred yards or so, the guide paused upon the verge of a low clump of prairie timber, and dismounted, signing to them to follow the example.

"Aw, now, you know—" Featherby began to drawl out, when he was stopped by the phenomenon of a glittering knife, within an inch of his breast. The knife was in the hands of Pete Burns.

"Silence, fur your life!" he whispered.

Featherby was open to moral suasion, couched in such pressing terms. He gasped and obeyed, and scarcely was the knife lowered when a troop of horsemen passed them at a rapid trot, going toward their old camp. They flitted by, like silent ghosts, and although it was hard to count them in that gloom, Grandison could judge by their front and flank that they numbered at least eighty men, well mounted. Featherby began to understand the danger now, and supposing this party to be the Indians he so dreaded, he literally gasped for breath in his deadly fear. But the rest of the party stood as immovable as statuary, while the troop passed within twenty yards of them with jingling rowels and martingales. As the sound of the hoofs died away in the distance, Pete sprang into the saddle.

"Keep together now, and ride as if you rode for life. Don't stop to think of anything but how to put as much distance as you kin between the inimy and us."

"Who are they, Pete?" said Ethelbert, as he mounted.

"Rocky Ben and his gang, I reckon. Leastways they ride like them. Stick in your spurs and away."

Away! The prairie spun by them in their headlong course over the grass, and Featherby, fearful of being left behind, rode as he never

rode before, his knees tucked up nearly to his chin, and his teeth almost rattling in their sockets. But, knowing that the others would make no pause for him, he never staid his headlong course, and actually kept neck and neck with Ethelbert.

"Bravo, old boy," cried Grandison. "You are doing nobly."

"I don't take any pleasure in it, you know," grumbled the Englishman. "Ca-ca-ca-can't you hold on a little?"

"Couldn't think of it," replied Grandison. "We must keep up this pace for an hour at least."

"Aw; good gwacious! I can't stand it so long."

"Oh, yes, you can. It is better to suffer a little by hard riding than to be caught by Rocky Ben and his ruffian crew, and left weaponless on the prairie, breaking up all my plans."

"B-b-b-but, how, i-if we b-b-break all our necks?"

"Never mind a small thing like that. Hurrah! It's a wild life they lead on the prairie, and I love it."

Featherby lacked the enthusiasm of his companion, and could not see any pleasure in such a life, full as it was of varied perils. But he nerved himself to keep with the rest until even Pete Burns was satisfied with the distance he had put between them and the ghostly band which had passed them on the heath.

"They hev waited in vain fur the signal of Sartou, and ar' goin' down to see about it," said Pete. "They'll wait long afore he gives a signal, I reckon."

"We are under obligations to the mysterious hand which laid him low," replied Ethelbert. "Without that we might have been surprised while sleeping."

"I hev heard the cry of the Wild Man onc't afore, and I know it now," said Pete. "He and no other killed Sartou."

"Ha!"

"I'm talkin'. I ain't quite sartain in my mind whether or not the Wild Man ain't friendly to them that ar' honest. 'Tennyrate, I'll never pull trigger on him ef I kin help it!"

"There is no danger from these ruffians tonight, Pete. They cannot follow us until morning. Let us take it easy, and we shall soon be among the foothills."

The path led them through the passes of the foothills, as the approaches to mountain ranges in the great West are called, over a broken and precipitous ascent, and over flinty rocks and shales upon which their horses' feet left no marks. But the guide did not intend to trust altogether to this, and halting in a sheltered pass, he cut a blanket into small squares and tied them over the hoofs of the horses in such a way that they left no track upon the occasional spots of earth over which they passed. Now they descended into sheltered canyons, then went up a gentle slope or climbed a lofty height, until they were far above the level of the plain upon a mountain plateau. From this they began to go downward, pursuing a narrow and dangerous pass, until the sound of running water apprised them of the fact that they were approaching some stream. Directly after their

feet pressed soft green grass, and the guide, with a sigh of relief began to pull off his saddle.

"Strip your hosses, boys, and turn 'em out to grass. Here we stop, and thar ain't a safer place in the Rockies."

They stripped off the blankets and laid down to rest, and, certain that they were safe, slept until morning. When daylight came, they found themselves in a valley containing perhaps five acres of bottom-land, through which flowed a clear, bright stream, another tributary of the great river they had left. Around them rose the eternal mountains, spire on spire, as they had been built up by the hand of that wonder-worker, Nature. Pete Burns was the first on his feet, and producing from his pouch a hook and line, he sought bait in the rich soil beside the stream, and began to fish from a shelving bank, where the water was nearly twenty feet deep. Before the rest of the party were awake he had laid out upon the ground a dozen beautiful trout, which would have made an Eastern fisherman frantic with joy. Not one of the lot weighed less than a pound, and there was one "king" fish which would have turned the scale at five! As he pulled out the last fish he was joined by Grandison.

"What glorious sport you are having, Pete. Confound you, man, why didn't you call me?"

"I didn't think you would keer about it, boss," replied Pete. "Ain't they beauties, though? I reckon nobody ain't goin' to starve in this gulch. Here, Neddy; come and help me clean these fellows, while Wat builds up a fire. Be keerful of the smoke, Wat; don't use wet wood."

In half an hour the party were discussing the merits of the mountain-trout with keen appetites, and when they had "cleared the table" by the summary process of throwing away their plates, which were nothing more nor less than pieces of bark, they were ready for business.

"What's the next thing, boss?" demanded Pete.

"You told me something about a beautiful waterfall somewhere in the mountains," said Ethelbert. "I would like to see that and make a sketch."

"You won't give up that durned pencil pictures, will you?"

"Not if I can help it."

"But Rocky Ben may light on us."

"I don't fear him in the least," replied the artist. "He shall not drive me back from the work I have undertaken."

"Ye'r' a man arter my own heart," said Pete.

"The rest of you chaps had better stay here and keep dark, unless Featherbed wants to come."

Featherby answered by a baleful glare as he turned to Grandison:

"I don't feel very well to-day, Bertie. My bones ache, and I'm sore all over, and I think I'll stay in camp."

"Just as you like," replied Ethelbert, who did not care to be hampered with him. "Are we to take our horses, Pete?"

"No; we go it on Shank's hosses to-day. Hosses wouldn't be much use whar we ar' gwine."

They took their arms and started up the pass

by which they had entered the valley, and after going half a mile, struck off into one of the numerous side-paths by which the canyon was intersected at various points. Suddenly the guide dropped to the earth and listened. Ethelbert followed his example, and they could hear the tread of horses' hoofs coming swiftly up the main pass to the right, though not the one by which they had entered the valley. Creeping to the edge of the cliff, screened by the overhanging bushes, the two men looked down, and saw a company of over fifty men, admirably mounted, and armed to the teeth with rifles, revolvers, knives and hatchets, moving in single file up the pass. Each man had a black visor covering his face to the mouth, and all wore black belts, upon which was worked the sign of the King of the Mountains, Rocky Ben. They looked like a hardy race, bold and strong, and managed their horses with consummate ease and grace. Neither of the watchers could doubt that they saw before them the noted robber-band of the redoubtable Rocky Ben, the terror of the mountains, the man of many crimes and yet who had a reputation for chivalrous daring and for the craft of the arch-fiend himself.

No man could say that he had ever seen the face of the mountain chief, although many had been robbed by him. His cunning had made it a rule for his men to go always masked when upon duty, and for this reason they could mingle with the men they wished to rob, and betray them to their enemy.

The two men who rode in front were powerful fellows, and the one on the left hand was certainly an Indian, although he wore the mask like the rest. They passed on, leaving the two men gazing at the narrow opening through which they had gone in silent wonder.

"By gracious!" said Pete. "It would be doin' the world a sarvice ef we could wipe out that devil's band, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, but how is it to be done? In these mountain passes, knowing every defile and forest road, they would be a match for a squadron of United States dragoons."

"You don't think I'd try to fight them devils in the'r own mount'ins with Untited States dragoons do yer? Not sech a fool as *that* I reckon! Did you notice that strange chap on this side? That's a red-skin, and I know him."

"Who is he?"

"Red Raven, the Pawnee. I've seen him many a time at the forts, and he's a born devil in a fight, but not a bad chap arter all when you come to know him. He'll steal horses—any Injun will—but he'll give a man a show for his life ef he can. I wonder what he is doing with Rocky Ben?"

"Probably they are allies," said the artist.

"Ha! what is that?"

A rapid step was heard, and as they gazed, the singular being they had seen upon the mountains the day before came down the pass at a rapid pace, following upon the trail of the robber band. He flew by so quickly that they had barely time to take note of his presence, when he was gone. As before, he was armed with a heavy club, which he used in helping himself over the pass, making rapid progress. Pete Burns raised his rifle, but something in the

wild being restrained him, and he held his hand.

"I kain't do it, Grandison. It seems like shootin' at a friend to pull trigger at the Wild Man. He ain't done us any thing but good, and while that lasts let him live on. Come on and I'll take ye whar we kin see them ag'in."

Taking a short cut which he well knew across the mountains, the guide hurried away, closely followed by his companion, whose dark eyes began to flash, as his companions had seen them when in the jungles of Asia he met the royal tiger thirsting for his blood. They went at a sort of trot which took them rapidly over the ground, and soon struck the pass again. As before, they concealed themselves, and soon heard the coming hoofs of the horsemen. As the band passed this time they noticed some one they had not seen before—a half-breed girl of rare beauty, who had joined them in the pass.

She was riding a fiery mustang of the fiercest breed, and controlled him with a master hand. Grandison felt his companion start and clutch his arm, and so savage was the grip that it was with difficulty that the young man shook off the hold. Ethelbert saw that his eyes were fixed upon the Indian girl in a savage way in which love and doubt were strangely mingled, and he knew that the wrong which Rocky Ben had done the guide, was centered in this girl. Her skin was rather dark, but her features were faultless in their *contour*, and her figure graceful and well-developed. Her long hair, unconfined, swept down to the saddle behind her, and had a wave and luster in it never to be seen in an Indian of pure blood.

They passed on, but the strange look did not die out of the guide's face. He raised himself to shake his clinched hand after the retreating band, the look of fearful hate making his face terrible.

"She lives, arter all, Rocky Ben and I live, too, and never will Pete Burns rest until you ar' under the sod! I'll track you down, I swear by the eternal mount'ins round about."

"Who is this Indian girl, Pete?" said Grandison, who was intensely interested.

"Her name among the whites is Ida Garretson, and she is of the blood of the Delawares. Her father was a Missouri man that made his home among the Injins. I loved her dearly, and I'd give my life for her now, but, Rocky Ben stole her."

"I don't understand you."

"'Twas two year ago, and she liked me mighty well. Ef she told the truth, she cared a deal for me, rough and ready hunter through I am. The Injins went out on a great hunt and she went with them, and while we were out, Rocky Ben came down on a party of our men and robbed 'em."

"Did she leave any message?"

"How could she? They said the leader of the robbers took her on the saddle in front of him, and threatened the men with death if they dared say a word. 'Tell the Delaware chief that I have use for this girl and he shall never see her face again. This is from Rocky Ben.'"

"She did not seem to be under any restraint with them,"

"Who kin tell the reason? She's 'mong rough men that wouldn't hesitate to kill her, and—What's that?"

"The Wild Man again," whispered the artist. "Ha! he is hiding behind the rock. What does that mean?"

The strange creature was crouching behind a huge bowlder, with one knee resting on the earth, and the huge club he carried clasped in his hairy right hand, resting upon the ground. He seemed to listen in an eager, excited manner, and his movements all were like those of a human being.

"What is the critter waitin' fur?" said Pete, raising himself to look.

The guide again turned toward the Wild Man, who still listened. Even as they gazed, Pete heard, far down the glen, the sound of a horse's feet coming at full gallop, and waited. Five minutes after a mustang appeared at the entrance of the canyon, bearing upon his back one of the followers of Rocky Ben. As he came in view the couchant figure rose and launched itself upon the horseman with the club raised in air. The robber drew bridle with a cry of fear and tried to draw a pistol; but, before he could succeed, the blow fell, and he lay dead in the narrow pass, while his riderless horse went careering up the glen in the direction pursued by the band of Rocky Ben. The long, claw-like hand was extended, and tore the mask from the face of the dead man, and looked for a moment into the still face. Then, uttering a hoarse cry, the creature dashed down the crape mask, and bounded up the rocky side of the pass with an agility and speed which was wonderful.

The next moment, with a wild cry which echoed with horrible distinctness through the glen, he was gone. Pete drew a long breath, and looked steadfastly down upon the face of the dead man, three hundred feet below.

"Seems to me I know that man, too," he said. "You hold on until I go down and make sure of it."

Pete went cautiously down the rugged side of the canyon, hanging by rocky points and roots until he reached the bottom. He bent for a moment over the dead form, and then proceeded to search his pockets.

"Did you know him, Pete?" asked Grandison, upon the guide's return.

"You bet! A bloody villain he was, too, and he had more than *one* murder on his soul. The last time I see'd him was in Leavenworth. He killed a harmless sort of Dutchman that lived thar, and cut away from thar toward the fort. I put after him with twenty men, and we caught him at Leavenworth, and gave him up to the United States people. What do you think they did? Why, they jest let the infernal skunk go on bail; or ravyther some new-fangled institution they call a *Habbis Korpus*. I dunno what in Satan that means, but it cl'ared him. We wa'n't gwine to stand *that*, so we took him ag'in, and started back to the Injin nation. When we got thar he was tried, and we agreed to hang him in the mornin', but he broke out that night and escaped. Sence that time I've heard of him, and never no good."

"What was his name?"

"Bilkey; Jim Bilkey."

"Ha! It is the name of a man who, with some confederates, robbed the house of a man near Kansas City, killed his wife after subjecting her to the most horrible indignities, left the man for dead upon the floor, and escaped. There was something singular about the whole transaction, for the daughter of this man, a beautiful girl, as I heard, has never been heard of since. The man's name was Arthur Bird-sall."

"It mou't be this Bilkey; he was a dirty scoundrel enuff for anything. I've cleaned out his pockets, and he had about five hundred dollars in 'em. The way things look now we are goin' to strike it rich in this kentry. That makes thirteen hundred we've raised in two days."

"I don't think we had better stay here longer, Pete. Some one of this wild band may come back to look for their comrade."

"They'll find the mark of the Wild Man on him ef they do," said Pete, with a laugh. "What d'ye think we'd better do? I'm fur trackin' these wild beasts down, fur I'm bound to know ef Ida stays willin' among 'em, that's all. Now, you like adventur's, don't ye? Then j'ine me in this, and I'll promise ter take the gal from these p'izen vill'ins."

Grandison looked at the scout, and saw that his face was working with ill-suppressed emotion, and he began to understand that the rough borderman had a big heart.

"There's my hand, Peter Burns," he said, striking it into the hard palm of the other. "I'll stand by you, even to the end."

"Tha's hearty," said Pete. "I won't forgit it, neetler; and now come on."

He led the way at his usual rapid pace, as before, taking a course across the mountain to again cut off the band of the infamous Rocky Ben. As before, they were successful, and now a strange chase began. While the wild cavalcade rode along the pass, the two men clung to the mountain-side, following like bloodhounds on the scent. At last they came to a place where an inaccessible bluff barred the way and forced them to make a circuit of a quarter of a mile, before they could again reach the ravine. Just before they reached the verge they heard the voices of their enemies, and then a heavy crash was heard. A moment after they were looking down into the canyon, but it was deserted. Of all the robber band, not one was in sight, and the ravine was in full view for over a mile, and they could not have passed on.

Had the earth opened and swallowed them up? We shall see.

CHAPTER V.

THE RED RAVEN.

THE two men stood gazing at each other in wonder and dismay, for they could not understand this strange phenomenon. Where had the robber band gone so suddenly, leaving no trace? They could see the pass upon the other side, and there was no break in its rugged surface to indicate a side path. Wherever they had gone, they had vanished as completely as if an earthquake had swallowed them, horse and man.

"This won't do," said Pete Burns. "I'm go-

in' down to see about this thing, I am. Ar' you goin' with me or not?"

"Lead on," replied the artist, firmly, "and we will learn the meaning of this strange affair."

They made their way into the canyon, holding their weapons ready. Reaching the bottom, they found the pass beaten by old and new tracks of horses, but nothing to indicate where the horsemen had gone.

The beat of hoofs announced new-comers, and they hastily sought hiding-places, just as two horsemen appeared, who bore upon a horse between them the dead body of the man slain by the "Wild Man." They passed at a slow trot, and were out of sight. The next moment they heard a harsh voice cry:

"Who asks entrance here?"

A voice replied:

"One who has sworn by rope, knife and bullet. When he is untrue, let rope, knife or bullet do their appointed work."

There was a jarring, grating sound, a sort of crash, and the voice ceased. The two men lay concealed for some time, and then the scout crept cautiously forth. As before, the canyon was empty, and the ragged rocks round them mocked their useless search.

"Thar's only one way," said Pete, "and that is to lay in hiding until we l'arn the secret of this place. I am going to do it."

"And I am with you, old boy," replied Ethelbert, as they again sought a hiding-place among the rocks.

Neddy Forrester and the rest remained quietly in camp all that day, and waited for the return of their two friends. Until night came on, they thought nothing of their leader's continued absence, but when evening brought neither Pete nor the artist, Neddy and Watkins began to exchange expressive glances. Featherby, on the contrary, who was suffering from his hard ride of the day before, did not seem to care much whether they returned or not.

"I'm goin' on a scout in the morning," announced Neddy. "That is, ef they don't come back afore."

"And I'm goin' with you," declared Watkins. "You may bet on that."

"But, see heah, you chaps, what are you going to do with me?" Featherby demanded.

"I don't reckon to do anything with you, Featherbed," replied Neddy. "Only as I'm goin' on a scout, I won't hev no such truck hangin' on to me."

"What do yah mean by that, yah gweasy huntah! Do yah mean to insult me?"

"Dunno nothin' 'bout that, Featherbed, but my best friend, a man that's stood by me through thick and thin, a true hunter, a brave scout, and a good fighter, ain't goin' to be left in danger because Featherbed don't like it."

"See heah, if you call me that name ag'in, I'll forget my rank and call you out."

"Out whar?"

"To fight."

"Me fight you! Why, you insignificant hop-o'-my-thumb, whar would ye be ef I was to hit ye? Ef I shook my fist at you I ain't sart'in but you'd fall down jest with the wind of it."

"Don't let us quarrel," said Featherby, who saw that Watkins was glowering at him angrily, and did not expect any help from that quarter. "I don't want you to leave me heah all alone."

"Why, you born idiot, nobody kin get at you hyar."

"I ain't so sure of that. Suppose a baah was to come?"

"What's a 'baah'? A sheep, d'ye mean?" said Neddy, misunderstanding him willfully.

"Ain't no sheep hyar, 'cept it's a bighorn."

"I don't mean a sheep," replied Featherby, indignantly. "I mean a baah, a *baah*, a gwizzly baah."

"Oh, Old Eph, you mean. Wal, ef he comes, and you kain't git to a tree, I reckon you'll git chewed up, sart'in sure. But, don't let a little thing like that trouble you. Like ez not you won't see a grizzly, and ef the wolves come, you jest pick up a chunk of fire and chase 'em."

The look of horror with which the exquisite gazed at the trapper upon this good advice, would have made John Leech's fortune, and Neddy broke into a roar of laughter, in which he was joined by his companion. Though they laughed, they were ill at ease, and did not sleep well that night. As soon as the light began to glint the east, Neddy was on his feet, and woke Watkins, intending to steal away without awakening the cockney, but the terror of that worthy had been too great to suffer him to sleep much, and he was on his feet as soon as they.

"Let me go with yah, Mistah Forrester, now do. I don't like to stay heah."

"Somebody must stay and see arter the hosses, you useless critter. Now shet up, do. I ain't goin' to hev ye with me."

"But I *will* go, do yah heah? I'll go in spite of yah."

"You will, eh? Now you git back, git 'way back, I notice ye. You offer to come arter me and I'll mash ye right in yer boots."

Featherby saw that he was destined to be left alone, and became nearly frantic.

"I'll tell you w'at you kin do, you poor-sperreted critter," said Neddy. "You wait hyar one day and one night, and ef we don't come back, mount a boss and put out to the fort. You stick to the river, and you kain't fail to reach it."

"I can't find my way out of the mountains," bawled Featherby. "Oh, deah, oh, deah! What would my parents say if they saw me now?"

"Likely they'd say you was a durned fool, and they'd be mighty right. Now ain't you a sweet infant to go a-bawlin' that way, like an overgrown baby? Git out! I kain't b'ar to look at you. Ef we don't come back, you take Pete Burns's mustang, and he'll take ye out of the mountains all right."

"I'd rather go with yah," sniveled the unfortunate adventurer.

"Shouldn't wonder, but it kain't be did. Come on, Wat."

The two men at once took a course for the place to which the guide and his companion had started the day before. Suddenly their path was impeded, for an Indian in full war-dress, with knife and hatchet in his belt, and rifle in

hand, bounded into the path before them. Each man instinctively threw forward his rifle, but hesitated to fire, for the echoes might bring new enemies upon them.

"White men," said the warrior, "I am the Red Raven of the Pawnees, a chief among the tribe, and I speak the words of wisdom. Turn back while there is time, for danger lies in the path before you."

"Red Raven!"

"You have heard me speak," replied the warrior, proudly. "Is not my name known upon the prairie?"

They looked at him closely, for he was a man known and feared for his prowess—a man yet young, but with a strength of limb and compact figure rarely to be seen among the Indians. His face, brown, but comely, had an open, winning expression, although it was known that in battle he could be the fiercest among many savage foes. Wherever the battle-cry of the Pawnee was heard, Red Raven was foremost of all. Upon his head was a sort of tiara of eagle-plumes fastened at the brow by a fillet of soft buckskin. He wore the buckskin leggins and hunting-shirt of his tribe, and his moccasins were gayly adorned with glittering beads. About his waist was a belt curiously made, and evidently the result of Indian skill, bearing the emblems of his nation, once the leading tribe of the West.

"Why should we go back?" said Neddy, who had begun to recover the customary *sang froid* of the trapper. "The hills are free to all, and fur my part, I don't keer to turn back. We seek arter our friends, who were lost yesterday."

"Seek for them no more, for you shall never look upon their faces again. You say well they are lost, and they are lost forever."

"You don't mean to say that you hev killed them?" said Neddy, his brown cheek changing a little. "Ef you hev—"

"Let the White Buffalo keep his temper. It is not best to be hot to one who would be your friend. Those who were lost were not slain by the hand of Red Raven, and he would have set them free, but their enemies are many."

"Whar are they?"

"Ask no questions, for I cannot answer."

"You've got to," said Neddy, "or you don't get out of this alive."

"See," said Red Raven. "You may kill me, for you are two, and I am alone, but the sound of the short gun will bring upon you more enemies than you think. Shoot: I am ready."

Neddy hesitated, for he realized the truth of the saying of the Indian. If Rocky Ben and his infamous companions were indeed near them, the discharge of a pistol would bring enemies upon them from all sides. Yet satisfied that in some way his friends were in danger, he could not think of allowing the Indian to escape. But the savage was cool and self-possessed, looking with an amused smile at the troubled face of the guide.

"Tell me where my friends are," said the trapper, "that I may git to help them."

"No; I have said you cannot know. Three men have been slain, and their friends clamor for the blood of the man who has killed them."

"I know who you mean, and can give you the name of one. His name was Sartou."

"You speak true. He was killed by the men you call your friends."

"He was not. He was killed by the Wild Man of the Mountains."

"Do you speak true?"

"Yes. All these men were killed by the Wild Man, though I will say that Sartou only got what he deserved, for he joined us to betray us."

"Sartou had a bad heart, and had done much evil. I am sorry for your friends, for one of them once saved the life of Red Raven from a bear."

"Pete Burns?"

"Yes. The Pawnees call him the Prairie Traveler. But he has a good heart, and the Red Raven is sad to know that he is in trouble. Will you swear to me by the great Spirit to whom even Indians bow, that he had no hand in the death of those who wore the belt of the Eagle?"

"Yes. They died by the hand of the critter we call the Wild Man."

"It is well. Go back then, White Buffalo, and trust to the Red Raven. He will see that no harm comes near the Prairie Traveler or the young white man."

"Won't you tell me whar they be, Raven? I can't rest easy while I know that they ar' in danger, fur they've both bin good friends to me."

"Ask no more, but go as you are sent. When the Raven speaks let the white man listen to his voice, for his are only the words of truth, and he loves to do right. Though terrible in battle, he knows how to deal justly."

Forrester still hesitated.

"Delay not," cried the Red Raven, touching a horn which hung at his girdle, "or I sound upon the bugle and the Brothers of the Eagle will come down upon you like a great river, to slay and spare not."

"Would Red Raven leave a friend in danger?" demanded Forrester.

"No, unless another friend swore to him that they should be safe. Where will you seek for them if you go on? They are hidden where the foot of man never rested, except the Brothers of the Eagle. Let Red Raven do the work for which he is sent."

"I'm agreed," said Forrester, rather sullenly.

"Let it be as you say."

"Stay. You have spoken of the Wild Man of the Hills. Have you looked upon his face?"

"No; but Pete Burns and Grandison have seen him, and they knew his voice when Sartou was killed."

"Then you have not seen his face?"

"No."

"The Wild Man of the Hills, whom the Pawnees call the Black Spirit, hates the Brothers of the Eagle, and most of all, the chief of the Eagle."

"Rocky Ben."

"Ha! who dares speak the name of the chief! Beware, for the rocks and trees have ears and will carry your words to the chief, and he will awake in his wrath and destroy you. Listen."

Even as they stood they heard the sound of low music, coming up from the very earth beneath their feet. A weird, muffled, unearthly sound, which rung through the air about them, stealing on their senses like the notes of a solemn march. Forrester was imbued with the superstition so common among the simple men with whom his life had been passed, and he felt a sensation akin to fear.

"What is that?" he gasped. "Let's leave this hyar place, Wat; it's no good to be hyar as I kin see."

"Farewell; and remember what I have said," cried the Raven.

They turned back over the road they had just traversed, leaving the chief, with folded arms, leaning against a rock.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE DUNGEON.

WE left Ethelbert and the guide lying concealed beneath the cliff, waiting for some clew by which they might gain the secret of the hiding-place of the mountain robbers. An hour passed on, then a portion of the rocky wall before them swung outward like a door upon its hinges, and a mounted man rode out and was gone down the pass at a breakneck pace. He was closely masked like the rest of the brothers of the band of Rocky Ben, and there was nothing about him to distinguish him from the rest. Two or three persons on foot followed him out, all closely masked, and lounged about in the canyon in a careless manner, evidently, however, keeping guard over another person, who had come out with them, a woman, covered from head to foot with a long, thick vail.

"Walk about as much as you like, miss," said one of the men. "You said you wanted to feel the sun."

"I am indeed tired of my dark prison," replied a sweet voice. "Why, oh, why, am I kept here?"

"Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies," said the man. "You must not try to make anything out of me, for it can't be did. No one but Rocky Ben knows why you are here, and so what's the use of talking?"

"I have done you no harm," replied the mysterious captive, in a plaintive voice, "and I am but a weak woman, and you strong men. Let me escape, and if it is ever in my power to repay you, I will do so."

"Bosh. We are not quite such fools as to get in the way of Rocky Ben. You don't know the man or you wouldn't ask it of me."

"I know that he is a desperate villain, a hardened wretch who would commit any crime no matter how hideous."

"I reckon that's so," said the man, angrily, "if you can't choose your words better. Let me tell you that Captain Ben will tame your pride before he has done with you, strong as you think yourself."

"No! I may die in this hideous prison from starvation; I may kill myself to escape dishonor, but never will I yield to his infamous demands. To the winds I throw this concealment."

She grasped the black vail with both hands and tore it from her face, and Ethelbert with

the utmost difficulty repressed a cry of astonishment at the beautiful face it revealed. It was that of a woman in the flush of her youth and beauty, with a form which might have been a sculptor's model of beauty. Her hair was of that rich golden brown which seemed to have caught the rays of the sun and entangled them in its meshes. Her complexion was pure and delicate, and her hands and feet were marvelously small. The eyes were "heaven's own azure," but though doubtless in repose they were tender and loving in their expression, they now blazed with anger and strong scorn against her captors.

"You've done it now," cried the man, springing to his feet. "Fool, it was for your own sake that Captain Ben kept your face veiled from the eyes of the men, and I'll not answer for your safety if they see you."

Ethelbert touched his companion's arm and looked into his eyes. Each read in those glancing orbs the same determination, to rescue this beautiful girl or die. Grandison had passed through the *salons* of the old world, thronged with the beauties of the land, but this fair girl in her helplessness, made a strong appeal to his compassion. They rose by a simultaneous movement, and the guide balanced his hatchet a moment in his right hand and sent it whizzing through the air at the head of the nearest of the two men; twice it turned in its course, and sunk deep into the forehead of the outlaw, who fell without a cry, while his companion stared stupidly about him, taken completely by surprise at the sudden death of his friend, when the two men darted out at him together, with weapons ready. Releasing his grasp on the arm of the girl, he raised his fingers to his lips and emitted a sharp, clear whistle, and drawing his knife, stood up to the shock. He was a wiry, athletic fellow, and for a moment stood up well against them, parrying their thrusts skillfully, and trying to keep them at bay until aid could come to him, as he evidently expected. But they saw his plan and pressed him all the harder.

"Away with you, Pete," cried the young traveler. "Take the lady with you, and escape if you can, and leave me to take care of this fellow."

"I kain't leave you."

"I order you to go," replied Ethelbert, parrying a vicious thrust and lunging in return with such good effect that the arm of the ruffian dropped nerveless to his side.

Pete grasped the hand of the girl, who had remained stupefied up to this moment, and they started at a rapid pace along the canyon path, closely followed by Ethelbert, who had knocked down his opponent with his fist. Hardly had they gone ten feet when they heard the click of the opening stone door, and there passed out a motley group of masked men, with weapons in their hands. The man who had been knocked down pointed down the glen, for he could not speak, and the men started in pursuit. Incumbered by the lady, the two gallant men who had rescued her could do little except turn upon their assailants in the narrow pass and fight for their lives, telling her to continue her flight. But she would not leave them, and they

fought in vain against overwhelming masses of their enemies. Borne down by numbers, their weapons were torn from their hands and they were bound hand and foot and dragged back to the secret portal.

"Here they are," cried a terrible voice. "And now they shall earn the fate of meddlers with that which does not concern them. Does any one here know them?"

"I do," said a voice, evidently disguised.

"Who are they, then?"

"Sartou's party."

"Ha! I am glad we have them in our power, for they shall pay dearly for the death of Sartou."

"Shall we blindfold them, captain?"

"Yes, although the precaution is needless, as in any case their doom is sealed."

They wrapped handkerchiefs tightly about the eyes of the two men, and then lifting them in their arms, carried them through the dark portal, which opened to receive them, and closed behind with a hollow sound. The captain had taken the hand of the girl for whose sake they were in bonds, and was looking at her savagely.

"So you tried to escape, madam?"

"Certainly; is there anything so enticing in the shelter you give me that I should care to remain with you?"

"I will take means to provide against another such attempt. Mad girl, did you see the looks which these dark men of mine cast on your beautiful face? You have done a foolish, mad thing in removing your veil."

They were traversing a dark path under the earth, lit only by torches in the hands of the masked band. A desolate, dark and slimy place, dripping with moisture from the moss hanging from the rocks, and a sickly steam rose on every side. Truly, they walked in the shadow, and the girl shuddered as she entered that dismal place from which she had but for a moment escaped.

"Hear me, Rocky Ben; I am in your power," she said. "I cannot hope to escape, nor do I, until death claims me. But, for these brave men, who so nobly attempted my rescue, although their efforts have failed, I feel deeply. Let them go free, and you have a claim upon my gratitude—a thing you have never had yet."

"Let them go free, with the secret of the retreat in their hands, and the blood of a comrade not yet dried into the ground, shed by them? You know not what you ask. I should not dare, strong as my will is among these men, to propose such a thing to them."

"Can nothing make you swerve?"

"Yes, one thing, and one only."

"And that?"

"That you comply with my desires. For that I will do anything, dare anything. I will swear upon the Bible whose faith you follow to give up my hopes here and hereafter to aid you in setting these men free. I will strive by any and every means to attain this end, and only ask this in return: the treasure of your love."

"Away! I scorn you and your words, and will not sell myself to you, although you bid high, so high that even I am in doubt which way to turn and what to do. But I will not

yield to you, and will sooner die by my own hand."

"There are worse fates than death," hissed the outlaw, with his mouth close to her ear. "Shall I tell you one of them?"

"Wretch! Dare to insult me by the thought which is in your base heart, and I will find a way to teach you that the women of my race know how to avenge an insult."

"That pride of race will crop out at times, Aline," said the other, with a bitter laugh. "I feel it sometimes myself, as low as I have sunk in the esteem of the world and in my own. I have lost all which could make life dear, and it is only at times when I am alone that the iron enters into my soul. We have said enough, more than enough, and you had better go back to your room and remain there entirely, for you will not be allowed to go out again."

They had entered a lofty cavern with a smooth white floor, which had evidently been much used. Its walls sparkled in the light of a roaring fire, built in a sort of natural fireplace at one side, the smoke of which rose and disappeared through the funnel-shaped roof. The outlaws made their prisoners sit upon the floor, and the chief led the captive women to an iron studded door at one side of the room which he pushed open.

"Go in," commanded Rocky Ben. "And think that you are going into your grave if you do not comply with my demand."

"Into my grave be it, for while I have life I will resist you," she cried, as the door closed heavily behind her and the bolt shot into its place. Rocky Ben turned back to the place where the prisoners sat upon the floor, returning the savage glances of their captors boldly.

"Now, men," he said, "are you satisfied that you have put your heads into the jaws of the lion without first asking leave to draw it out?"

"We are willing to abide by our acts," replied Ethelbert. "Do your worst, for I defy you."

"Ha! you crow loudly, young man, but I may find a way to change your voice before I finish with you. First of all, let me ask you what became of Sartou, the man who joined you at Leavenworth?"

"He is dead," replied Grandison. "We buried him with the signal-rockets lying by his side."

"Signal-rockets!"

"That starts you, does it? You, who lay your infamous plots to compass the destruction of honest men—you, who send emissaries about the country to betray travelers and hard-working trappers. Horse-thief and murderer! You have gained a fair name, have you not?"

"Silence! unless you are tired of life, and want me to kill you," screamed Ben.

"There is little to hope for at your hands," replied the young traveler. "I am as ready to die, if my time is come, as any other man, and I will meet my fate calmly."

"What say you, boys?" said Rocky Ben, turning to his men. "These men have killed Sartou, Diaz, and Strong. Shall they live or die?"

"Die!" cried the fierce band, in chorus. "Let nothing save them."

"Just as you say, and since they confess the murder of these men, nothing ought to save them."

"We have made no such confession," replied Ethelbert. "The only man who fell by our hands was the one who was killed in the attempt to rescue the lady you hold prisoner."

"You said you buried Sartou?"

"Yes, but he was killed by the being known as the Wild Man of the Hills."

Ben staggered as if a pistol-ball had suddenly pierced his bosom, and looked wildly at the speaker. "The Wild Man! At every step he crosses me. Who and what is this terrible being?"

"I do not know. The three men you speak of, perished by his hand."

"This is merely a catch to save yourself, young man. It won't do for the Brothers of the Eagle. Even if it is true, you do not deny that you killed Ranger at the entrance of the cave."

"Why should I? It would make no difference in my fate."

"You are a young man of great penetration," said Ben, laughing. "Knowing, as you do, the secret of the retreat, is enough to doom you, and you may as well say your prayers at once, for your fate is sealed."

"Look hyar, Rocky Ben," said Pete, speaking for the first time. "I reckon you and I mou't as well have a settlement. Whar hev you stowed away Ida, the gal you captered on the prairie, three years back?"

"Have you waked up, most worthy trapper? I am glad to hear your voice, for I feared that some one had cut out your tongue. Who told you that I had anything to do with the girl of whom you speak?"

"It don't make any difference who told me," replied Pete, "but this I do know, ef I ever get cl'ar of this, I'll raise yer ha'r for the deed, now you bet."

"I don't think you will ever 'git cl'ar' long enough to perform the operation of which you speak so freely. You have looked your last upon daylight. I am sorry to cut you off too, for you would make a good addition to my band. What say you: will you take an oath, and become one of us?"

"No. I've been an honest man all my life, and I ain't goin' to join with thieves even to save my life. Ef I had my hands loose, I'd break yer jaw for makin' the offer."

"Enough said; you refuse the only chance. As for the girl, she is here, and is going to be the wife of my lieutenant."

"I'd like to live long enough to kill the man you speak of," muttered Pete. "Thar; I'm done talkin', fur it's no use."

At this moment lights appeared at the other end of the cave, and the half-breed girl who had ridden with the party when they had passed up the canyon, entered the room, holding a torch in her hand. She was accompanied by the Indian chief, Red Raven, whose glittering eyes were fixed for a moment upon the prisoners, and then sought the face of Rocky Ben.

"Who are these?" he asked.

"Prisoners, the men who killed Ranger, and whom we think killed Sartou, Diaz and Strong."

"They do not look like bad men," said Red Raven, "and I know that the Big Trapper has a good heart in his bosom."

"Thank ye, chief," said Pete. "It goes to my heart to see a man like you consorting with blackguards like these."

"Peter!" cried Ida, starting forward. "Is this you; and have you come to save me?"

She stooped and was already beginning to loosen the bonds upon his limbs, when a man who had been seated apart from the rest rose up and dragged her away.

"What are you doing?" he said; "this man is doomed and nothing can save him."

"Release me," said the girl, struggling fiercely, "or I shall do you a mischief. You know me, Albert Lawson, so beware."

"I know that you are the devil when your passions are roused," replied the man, gloomily, "and would kill me if you had a weapon in your hand, but that makes no difference. If you are fool enough to prefer such a man as that to me, I will teach you something better."

"Don't mind me, Ida," said Pete Burns. "I've seen yer face, and know you hain't forgot me, and that's enough for me."

"Enough of this," cried Rocky. "Into the dungeon with them, and in the morning we shall see."

They were dragged to their feet and led away to a dark cavity in the rock, closed by such a door as that which shut in the prison of the woman they had tried to rescue. The door was locked behind them, and they were prisoners in utter darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

FEATHERBY "TREED."

WE left the Honorable Oscar Flint Featherby in what he regarded as doubtful security in the valley into which Pete Burns had led him. He was far from satisfied with his position, but he feared Neddy Forrester too much to attempt to follow him. After the two guides left him, he loaded his rifle carefully, and thrust the pistols into his belt, together with a long bowie-knife which he had bought in Leavenworth, and with the use of which he was as much acquainted as he was with Indian-fighting. He kept his rifle constantly in his hands, and was a walking arsenal, but a terribly frightened one, although he tried to convince himself that he would do fearful execution upon any enemy who might chance to appear.

After an hour had passed, and no enemy was in sight, he began to get over his fright somewhat, and concluded to try his hand at trout-fishing. The line which Burns had used lay upon the bank, and baiting the hook, he threw it into the water, and was soon struggling with an enormous trout, who could not resist the tempting bait. Featherby succeeded in landing him, and was baiting his hook for another cast when a low, grunting sound caused him to turn, and there, to his horror and surprise, he saw an enormous grizzly bear sitting upon his haunches, his head turned knowingly to one side, regarding him with a cunning eye.

Featherby started up, cold shivers chasing each other down his back, and into his boots, and looked despairingly about him for a place of safety. Bruin was evidently in no hurry, for he maintained his position upon his haunches, his cunning eyes looking terror into the soul of the unfortunate Featherby, who devoutly wished that he had remained beneath the shelter of the paternal roof which he had so foolishly left. He had heard that none but a crack shot dare trust himself to kill a grizzly at the first fire, and his hand trembled so much that he could not have been certain in shooting at the side of a barn at twenty paces.

"A baah!" he murmured, fearfully. "A gwizzly baah! Oh, deah me, I'm gone! I'm suah to be the first one he'll eat. I wish I was in London; catch me hunting again, if evah I can get out of this."

Bruin sat looking at his victim in evident curiosity, probably thinking him the most ridiculous biped it had ever been his fortune to see. Featherby glanced over his shoulder, and saw, just behind him, a small tree, firmly rooted into the soil. If he could only get to that tree he might escape, and throwing down the trout, which up to this time he had held helplessly in his hand, he whirled and started for the tree as fast as he could put foot to the ground. Ephraim at once dropped upon all-fours, and started in pursuit, but, as he passed the trout, it flapped violently, and drew his attention. Ephraim was fond of fish, and it was seldom that he could gratify his taste. He paused a moment, and turned the trout over with his paw, looked once more after the flying enemy, and then, no doubt thinking that he could easily overtake him after a slight repast, he lifted the struggling fish in his paws, and began to devour it. That fish was Featherby's salvation, for it enabled him to climb the tree, and perch himself in an uncomfortable position across a branch. He was unfortunate in having left his rifle behind him, and the only weapons he had were the pistols and knife, weapons not likely to aid a man like him in a struggle with a grizzly.

The situation was annoying as well as dangerous. As soon as the bear had finished the fish he began to look about for the Briton, and at last espied him upon his uneasy perch, looking woe-begone indeed. Probably a worse-frightened cockney did not breathe upon the earth than Oscar Flint Featherby.

"Why the dooce don't the bloody baah go away?" muttered Featherby. "This comes of following men out into the woods, just to be able to out-talk our fellahs. By gwacious, this is howid; I don't know what I shall do. Can that baah climb, I wondah?"

Luckily for him, the grizzly bear has too unwieldy a body to climb a tree, and the unfortunate, perched upon the limb, was safe for the present. But the bear, after roving about the tree for some time, standing on his hind feet and making awkward passes at the dangling feet of Featherby, which he could almost touch—and tearing off the bark of the tree with his teeth to such an extent that Featherby almost feared he would lose his frail support, lay down beneath the tree to wait.

Something to this effect was passing through the brain of the cunning brute: "I can't get at you where you are, and you won't come down now. You'll *have* to come some time, and I'll wait for you down here." If the brute could have spoken, that is about what he would have said to Featherby, and that individual understood it quite as well as if he had spoken.

"Now ain't this a purty fix fur me? Oh, demmit, demmit! Why did I evah come into this forsaken country to find my sepulcher in the jaws of a baah? It's awful, it's dreadful, and I don't know what I shall do."

Bruin winked at him as he lay upon the earth with his head resting upon his paws. He was master of the situation, that was evident, and meant to improve upon his knowledge, and the amateur sportsman was emphatically "freed."

At last, wearied almost to desperation, Featherby drew one of his pistols and took aim through the leaves at the head of the bear and pulled the trigger. The bullet struck just above the eye, and glancing from the bone, inflicted a severe wound, though not at all dangerous. It was enough, however, to drive the huge beast nearly frantic, and he raged about the tree, showed his white teeth, and growled in a manner which struck terror to the soul of Featherby. Suddenly the bear seized the tree in his fore paws and shook it so violently that it was with the utmost difficulty the sportsman maintained his position upon the limb, and, claspings the trunk with both arms, he gave vent to wild cries of terror which rung through the glen, waking the echoes in the old mountains around him.

All at once there came the sharp, clear report of a rifle, and Featherby saw the head of the bear sink slowly to one side; his limbs relaxed their hold, and he sunk to the earth, the clotted blood dropping slowly from a wound in his head. At the same moment the grasp of Featherby gave way and he dropped to the earth, fainting. Luckily for him he fell upon the body of the bear, which broke the force of the fall, and he lay there senseless. A hasty step was heard, and a man came running toward him with a rifle smoking in his grasp, evidently just discharged. The man was about thirty years of age, of a tall and graceful figure, with a face and head of marvelous beauty, if we may speak of beauty in a man. His hair was dark, thick, and glossy, and his skin, although rather dark, was smooth as a woman's. He wore his full beard, and was a splendid specimen of manly perfection, or would have been perfect but for his eyes, in which a latent fierceness seemed to linger. He looked first at the bear and satisfied himself that he was dead, and then turned over the senseless form of Featherby.

"Fainted, as I live. Now what business has such carrion as that upon the prairie? It is a typical face, however, but I have seen men with faces like that fight like devils when in action, and scent themselves as if going to a ball. Bah; it is all the same. Rouse up here; be a man, if it is in you."

"Oh, I'm dead, I'm dead!" moaned Featherby. "The baah, the baah!"

"Fool! coward!" cried the man. "Get up, will you? The 'baah' is dead."

Featherby rose slowly, casting a dubious glance at the huge body of his late antagonist, and evidently afraid of him, even though dead. The stranger looked disgusted, but said nothing for some moments, while his eyes roved quickly about the sheltered valley, taking in the horses grazing on the plain, the marks of feet upon the sod, and other evidences to show that Featherby was not alone in this place.

"Where are your friends, sir?" he said, in a quiet tone.

"Aw! I don't know," replied Featherby.

"You don't know? That is strange!"

"But I don't know, weally. They left me heah, though I didn't want to be left alone. I told Neddy Forrester that if he went away, like enough a baah would come after me, and you see the baah did come."

"It looks something like it," said the other, with a light laugh. "Stranger things than that happen in the mountains. May I ask the favor of your name?"

"My name? I am the Honorable Oscar Flint Featherby, of Piccadilly, London, and Featherby Lodge, Shropshire."

"A cockney! I knew it at a glance, for I have studied faces too much to be deceived. Do you know, that, like you, I have walked the London streets and frequented the theaters, the opera, and been in society? I could even name a party where I have met your father; a sharp old file he is, too."

"You ah right, sah. Upon my word you ah a very knowing fellah; the governor is sharp, too dooced sharp for me."

"So I should judge. You would hardly think, to look at me in my hunter's dress, that I have led the 'Lancers' with a countess. Yet so it is."

"It does seem *wather* stwange," said Featherby, glancing at his hunting-frock. "But, oh, demmit! I've seen too many of our fellahs down on their luck to wonder at it much. But London is the place after all; I don't like it out heah."

"Is it possible?"

"Yaas. It's all fun to wead about hunting baahs and lions, and tigahs, but when you come to being chased by a cweacha as big as a house, it ain't so funny."

"Have you found that out, my worthy friend? Never mind, you will have a good story to tell when you go back to Shropshire—if the Indians don't catch you going over the plains, and perhaps they won't—and you will be the wonder of the family. By the way, how long has this man you called Forrester been gone?"

"He went early in the morning, and he took Watkins with him and left me all alone, and now see what has happened. You don't think there is another baah anywhere near, do you?"

"I am sure I can't say. Very likely there is."

"Then don't you go away, Mistah— You didn't give me your name."

"To be sure. Now I come to think it over, I did not."

Featherby waited, expecting to be enlightened, but the stranger took a bunch of cigarettes

from his pocket, lighted one, and passed the paper to Featherby.

"You smoke, don't you?" he said, and Featherby took one, looking hard at his deliverer.

"Perhaps you would rather not tell me your name?" he said, at last.

"I had much rather not," replied the man, coolly, lying back on the soft grass, and smoking in luxurious ease. "It don't do to be too handy with your name on the prairie, or in the mountains."

"Aw, yaas; but I gave you mine."

"Then I'll give you one. Call me Milton, and see how that suits. I answer to it, and that will do just as well I suppose."

"Oh, I don't care, if you will only stay with me until Forrester comes back," said Featherby. "You see I never *did* like to be alone, and I like your style, if I don't, dem-me."

"Thank you for that; you are disposed to be complimentary; but do you know that there are a great many people who frequent these mountains who do not share your opinion? It only shows bad taste on their part, but it is a scandalous fact, notwithstanding."

"I don't think they have very good taste," said Featherby. "Anybody can see that you are a gentleman. Now there's Bertie Grandison. He's traveled over nearly every part of the earth where a man has put his foot, and some places where nobody ever lived, and yet he snubs me every chance he gets. He won't let me light a fiah when I want to, and do you know that those wascally guides called me Featherbed, and he only lawfed. Now I ask yah if that is fwendly?"

"Not at all. He certainly ought to be ashamed of himself for snubbing an 'Honorable,' and especially one from Shropshire."

Suddenly there came a patter of hoofs, and three men rode by at a breakneck pace, and disappeared in the mountain gorge. So quickly was it done that it was with difficulty Featherby could realize that they had stolen all the horses with the exception of that of Ethelbert, which was grazing quite near the men lying on the grass.

"By Jove, they are off!" cried the stranger. "Why don't you chase them, or do you mean to lose your property so tamely?"

"I can't do anything with four men," replied Featherby, coolly. "You can chase them if you like."

"I have no horse."

"Take that one; he don't belong to me, but you will bring him back?"

"Of course," replied the stranger, who was busy buckling the saddle-girth. "Give me your pistols, and I'll get your horses back, or die."

Featherby handed over the pistols, and the stranger thundered down the pass at a mad gallop, in pursuit of the horse-thieves, while Featherby kept his place quietly, smoking the remains of the cigarette.

"I don't s'pose he can catch them, and if he don't how mad Forrester will be. They took my horse, too; but one man caun't fight a dozen, I think."

"Hullo!" cried a hoarse voice. "Get up thar, will you?"

Featherby started up quickly, and found himself confronted by two men closely masked, who at once seized upon him.

"Come, shell out, you," said the first speaker. "Be durned quick about it, too, I ask ye."

In less than five minutes every penny upon the person of the unfortunate Featherby was transferred to the capacious pockets of the robber.

"Now, I'm goin' away," he said, "and I'll leave you the rifle. Don't you dar' to say a word, or I'll come back and swaller you alive."

The two men darted away up the mountain, leaving the hopeless Featherby completely stranded, utterly a beggar. Scarcely had the rocks hid them from view when Forrester and Watkins appeared, toiling down the mountain slope. What would they say?

CHAPTER VIII.

IDA GARRETSON.

NIGHT or day was the same in the black dungeon in which Ethelbert and Pete Burns lay confined. They could hear shouts of savage laughter from their captors, who, grouped about the fires, had produced a number of black bottles which circulated freely.

"Boys," said the leader, advancing, "in these years we have been together, and you have acknowledged me as your leader, have I been faithful or not?"

"Faithful, faithful!" cried the men.

"That is well. I am glad you speak well of me, for I covet your good opinion. When we made our rules and subscribed to them by an oath, did you understand that we must keep them to the letter?"

"Yes, yes; hurrah for the captain!" cried the wild band, clinking their bottles together.

"One of our laws is this: if by any chance an outsider becomes acquainted with the secret of our retreat, he has two chances: Either to join the band and subscribe to its laws and penalties, or else die by such means as we may choose. As matters look now, another year will enable us to leave this wild life and choose a life for ourselves. Our faces are unknown, and we can live among the very men we have robbed in peace and quiet, if we like, or, if that does not suit us, we shall have money enough to choose a home where we please. But how if our secret is discovered, and we become marked men? Dare you risk such a thing as that, or shall our laws be enforced?"

"The law! the law! We have sworn an oath and will keep it," shouted the men, rising to their feet.

"Bring out the prisoners," said Rocky Ben, "and let them know their fate."

The two men were dragged from their prison and brought into the full glare of the lamps. About them clustered at least two-score of dark masks, and weapons gleamed in the lamplight. The captain stood almost alone in the center of the room.

"Your names, gentlemen," he said.

"You know *my* name well enuff," said Pete, "and I reckon you ain't got anything to do with it."

"My name is Ethelbert Grandison," said the young artist.

"Your occupation?"

"An artist and author, traveling through the mountains to collect specimens and make sketches. I have reason to believe that my life is to be taken here, and I am thus full in order to exact a promise. Will you, after I am dead, send word to my father that I am dead? You need not tell him how."

"That shall be attended to in good time. But now let me offer you the one chance you have to save your lives. Join us, subscribe to our rules and take our oaths, and you shall be saved."

"Join you in robbery and murder! Do you dare to make such a proposition as that to me?"

"Do you refuse? that is the question."

"I do, most decidedly."

"And you, Pete Burns?"

"I'm tied, and kain't answer as I'd like to, but here's my idee. I've bin a free trapper this twenty year, ever sence I was high enough to hold a rifle level, and I never stole a pelt, nor killed a white haman that was honest, in my life, and I ain't goin' to begin now."

"They have answered," said Rocky Ben, sternly. "Return them to their prison and let them remain there until they are called. Set your affairs in order, gentlemen, and if you have any letters to write to your friends, I will furnish the material with which to do so. You will need a torch, and that your guard will furnish you, and I may say that I am sincerely sorry that you will not join us."

They were led back to their dungeon, and a torch thrust into a crevice in the wall gave them light. The two men sat down upon the stone floor and silently clasped hands. Strong men they were, and yet their situation was of the sort to try the stoutest soul.

"Pete," said Ethelbert, "I'm afraid your scouting and my traveling are at an end forever."

"Seems so," assented Pete. "But, Lord love you, what does it matter how a man goes under? I calculate we know how to die game, anyhow. I tell you what it is, Ethelbert, sence I've seen little Ida, and know she ain't forgot me, I sort o' seem stronger then I was, more ready to die like a man, if I must. You'd feel better ef you had some such thought in your heart."

"I have, Pete; I have. This beautiful girl we tried to rescue is ever near me, and I see her glorious face, and feel, after that, I have not lived in vain. I would give much to have a chance to see her, to know that she appreciates our efforts, and will grieve for us, dead."

"Sart'in she will," declared Big Pete, promptly. "She kain't help it, you know. I wonder how they mean to make an end of us, whether by knife, cord, or bullet? I hope it's the last, for I've lived where bullets fly, and I'd like to end with one of 'em at last."

"Hist!" whispered a low voice. "Take care, Big Peter!"

Burns heard the voice, but he was too well trained to suffer it to startle him. After a moment he saw that there was an opening in the wall in one corner, and at this a white hand

was waving. The opening was about five feet from the floor, and the hunter peeped into it, and saw just opposite the beautiful face of Ida, the half-breed girl. The two clasped hands through the narrow opening, and tears started into her eyes as she felt his fervent grasp.

"Ida, gal," he said in a hurried whisper, "I'm glad ye come to me. I'm a rough, hard man. The broad forest hez bin my habitation, the prairie my home by night and day. I've lived hard and worked hard, but I wouldn't 'a' bin the man I am only I thought I'd lost ye fur good. Now I'm ready, and I kin die if need be, but I shall die with your face before me, dear gal."

"Hush! you are not going to die, if I can save you. I am in as great danger as you, and if I cannot save you, I will at least die with you. Men shall see that Ida, the daughter of the Delaware, is not to be bought and sold."

"How did you get there?"

"Silence!" replied the girl. "Some one is coming to your door."

To his surprise, he found the opening through which Ida had been looking closed in his face, and he was staring at a bare, brown wall. Evidently the girl had made good use of her opportunities while in this place, and technically speaking "knew the ropes." At this moment the door opened, and a man came in carrying a small writing-desk, which he set upon the floor and withdrew. A moment after he came in with a smoking supper, which he set upon the table and again went out without speaking a word, locking the door after him.

"They do not propose to starve us," said Ethelbert, with a ghastly humor, which surprised himself. "Let us make the most of our privileges."

They were scarcely seated at the table, when the face of Ida again appeared at the opening. Pete sprung up and hurried to her.

"Keep quiet for an hour or two," she said, "and let them think you are sleeping. At the end of that time I will come again."

They ate with a good appetite, for something in the manner of the girl gave them hope of escape. When they had finished their meal the man came in and carried out the dishes, leaving two more torches unlighted upon the table.

"I reckon you will want to keep awake a good part of the night, strangers, seeing that it's probably your last night on airth, and so I've brought you plenty of lights. Good-night, boys; you won't see any of us before morning."

He went out, leaving them together.

For some time they could hear the outlaws carousing in the outer cave; but, little by little, the noise was hushed, as the men dropped off to sleep. Soon utter silence reigned in the place and Pete began to look for the coming of Ida. She did not disappoint him, for the opening again appeared in the wall, and in it the brown but comely face of Ida.

"All is ready," she said. "And now we must work out a hole large enough for you to pass through. Do you think you can do it?"

Pete made no reply but began to pick at the sides of the opening through which Ida was looking. The wall appeared to be a mere shell,

and shook and crumbled under his hands. Ida helped them from the other side, and soon a large, irregular piece of the rock gave way, and an opening was left large enough for them to pass through. Pete was through the opening in an instant, and had the half-breed girl in his arms, kissing her lips with ardor.

"I've passed through a dark sea, leetle 'un," he said; "and I've landed on dry land at last. I don't keer what comes to me now, and I'll hold you ag'in' Rocky Ben or any of his murderous crew."

"There, there, Peter! Let me go, and get to work. There is much to do before you can escape. First of all, let us fit this stone in its place again."

Pete and Grandison lifted the stone they had pulled out, and placed it in the proper position. It fitted to a nicety, and while Ida kept it in its place they piled the loose rocks which lay about in such positions that it would take considerable force to move it from the other side. Then Ida picked up the stone which exactly fitted the hole in the wall through which she had looked, fixed it in its place, and the work was done!

She now produced a small lamp which was set in a crevice, turned on the light and showed them where they were. It was a narrow passage carved by the hand of nature in the massive rocks, barely wide enough for two men to pass abreast. As they proceeded, the passage widened, and at length they came out into a room nearly as large as the one in which the outlaws were sleeping, where Ida set down the lamp.

"Here you are safe for the present," she said. "There is not one in all this infamous band who is aware of the existence of this room. I discovered it by accident myself, and have kept the secret, hoping to make it of use in the escape which I have been planning. I should have gone long ago, but for the sake of one who is dear to me, and whom I will never desert."

"Whom do you mean?" said Ethelbert.

"The prisoner of Rocky Ben, who calls herself Aline."

"Who and what is she?" demanded the young artist.

"I do not know. To me she has been a kind friend, and yet I feel that by birth and education she is something far above poor Ida, the half breed Delaware girl."

"I must see her, must speak to her, for I cannot consent to escape and leave her in the power of these ruffians."

"Yes, she must be saved, or it is not in my power to go away. I have promised sacredly to be true to her, and I will. You alone can help us, and I will be the one to tell you when the time comes. Until I call you, stay where you are. When I can get away long enough I will bring you food and drink."

"Hold on a bit, Ida," said Pete. "Tell me, do you dread any danger from that thief of the world they call Albert Lawson? Ef ye do, I won't rest until he's got his gruel."

"Don't fear for me, Peter. He knows that I am armed, and that I would kill him as I would a snake if he insulted me. I've another friend,

too, whom he fears, and who will protect me from him."

"A friend among these black-hearted thieves," said Pete. "Who is he?"

"The Red Raven, chief of the Pawnees," replied Ida. "He is a good man and brave warrior, and would have nothing to do with the Brothers of the Eagle but for an almost insane love he bears to the chief, Rocky Ben."

"And he's yer friend? Wal, Red Raven ain't a bad feller, and I done him a good turn onc't, and an Injin never forgits good or evil. I reckon you'd better go, little gal, though it goes hard to part from you so soon."

They kissed again and parted, and Ethelbert looked after her with a sigh. There was something in the tender love of these long-separated lovers that went to his heart. Rude and uneducated as the man was, and simple-hearted as was this girl, their love had the ring of the true metal, and he felt it.

"Heart of oak, she is," said Pete, sitting upon a rock. "I mou't 'a' known she'd be true, the dear little gal!"

"You are fortunate in your choice, Pete, and I am not the one to envy you, and yet, if I could be as sure of my choice as you are of yours, I should be the happiest man on earth."

"Hush! Is that the gal coming back?"

They drew apart into sheltered nooks and waited. The patter of coming feet was heard far off in the dim arches of the cavern. Nearer and nearer the steps came, and it seemed as though the feet of the new-comer were bare. It could not be Ida. Who was it?

The footstep ceased, as if the persons were listening, and then commenced again, and drew near. They held their breath in surprise, for, even in the obscurity of the cavern, they recognized the towering form of the Wild Man of the Hills! Why was he there?

CHAPTER IX.

THE EMPTY CAGE.

NEDDY FORRESTER and Watkins stopped in dismay as they saw that the horses were gone, and Featherby stood like Niobe, the picture of woe. He was afraid of the guides, afraid that the robbers would come back; and certainly the face Forrester put on as he approached was not at all prepossessing, and Featherby began to retreat.

"Hyar, you p'izen coward, hold on thar," roared Neddy. "Now, then; whar's them hosses?"

"They are gone, they are gone," cried Featherby. "I couldn't help it, you know."

"Don't know nothing 'bout it," replied Neddy, still advancing. "You jest tell me to onc't what's 'come on them."

"They took them away," moaned the Honorable Oscar. "They would take them, although I threatened to destroy them."

"Who ar' they. Speak out quick unless you want a black pill right through yer mizzable karkiss."

"The robbers, the robbers!" cried Featherby, dancing about in fear. "Don't point that weapon this way, pwease! I ain't afwaid of it, but it might go off, yah know."

"'Twill go off, sart'in, ef you don't tell what's happined instanter," replied Neddy.

"I'll tell yah, I tell yah. You see the baah came, just as I said he would, and fwightened me up a tree. Then I twied to shoot him, and killed him."

"What did yer shoot him with, Featherbed?" demanded Neddy, turning over the head of the bear with his foot.

"With a pistol."

"Now, don't lie to me, Featherbed, if you vally yer mizzable existence. That hole never was made by anything but a rifle-ball, an' yer a consarned idiot to try that game on me. Now, you start fresh, and the minnit you begin to lie, I'll know it, and down goes yer shanty. Now look out."

Thus encouraged, Featherby "started fresh" and told a tolerably straight story. Neddy's eyes began to sparkle as he mentioned the cool visitor, and he listened with breathless interest to the story.

"Thar; I guess you can set up for a born fool now, an' take the prize. You've not alone got robbed, but you've bin an' furnished the head robber with a hoss to go off on, I'm thinkin'. 'Tennyrate, you needn't look fur him to come back. He ain't no sech fool, I reckon."

"Oh, he'll come baack if the wobbers don't catch him," said Featherby. "He has got my pistols and Bertie's horse, and he must come baack to bring them, you know."

"Oh, you innercent critter! Ef it wa'n't a shame to strike a fool, I'd like to give you one fur luck. It's enuff to make a man strike his mother. Ef that chap comes back I'll eat my moccasins without any salt."

"Have—have you found anything of the othas?" faltered Featherby.

"Yes, I have, and they're nabbed by Rocky Ben. 'Twas the'r own fault, for they'd no right to go prowlin' round in the mount'ins when they know'd Ben was arter 'em. But they would have it, and now see what they've got."

"I told them they had bettah stay heah, you know," said Featherby.

It was the bad fortune of this man to injure any cause by upholding it, and Forrester at once passed over to the opposite side.

"And do you s'pose they was a-goin' ter listen to sech ravin' foolishness es yours, critter? They know better, and so they did ez they liked. Now see yere—thar's an Injin comin' hyar some time to-day, and don't you meddle with him, for he wouldn't think no more of raisin' yer ha'r than I would of takin' a beaver-belt."

"I'll take care not to trouble him, you know, and I'm wight sorry for Bertie, too. He always sed me well. But, what do yah want to bwing an Indian heah for?"

"I don't want any back talk from you, Featherbed. And, as fur the Red Raven, it won't be healthy fur you to say anythin' in his hearin' that you'd be sorry fur arter."

"You ain't goin' away, are you?" said Featherby. "I won't stay heah alone any moah, whether you like it or not."

"You don't say! Whar would you be ef my hungry passions rose ag'in' ye, as they are every-

ways likely to do, the way you go on? I'll go ef I like, an' you'll stay hyar, I reckon."

"No, I won't stay heah. If I must be killed, I'll be killed in a fight with a man, not clawed to pieces by a baah, you know. It ain't any use to look mad; I've made up my mind what to do."

"Durn my buttons ef the critter ain't deservin' of praise fur onc't. I like that, I do, by gracious. You'd fight with Neddy Forrester, the Big Buffalo of the Rockies. The rip-snortin', tearin', aggravatin' torment; the wild half-and-half of the boundless praharies. Oh, yes!"

"I won't stay heah," repeated the exquisite, sullenly. "No, I won't; you can't drive me back while I've got life."

He was evidently desperate, or he would not have dared to defy Neddy Forrester, the desperate Indian-fighter and guide. Watkins, who had been looking on in silence, began to laugh. "You've got the critter's dander up, Neddy, I swear; I didn't think you could do it, nobow. Don't let's waste time on him, ef thar's ary chainece to git our hosses."

"Thar ain't the ghost of a chainece, unlest Red Raven will help us, and the only way fur us is to set down and wait."

Red Raven, after his meeting with the two guides, hurried down the mountain, and gave the usual signal at the rocky door and was admitted. He found the whole family of outlaws in confusion, gathering with cries of surprise and fear about the dead form of one of their number, who had been slain while sleeping. The marks of iron fingers were upon his throat, which satisfied them that he had been strangled, and in the dust which had collected upon the floor they found the print of a large, naked foot. They had seen that track before and knew it for that of the dreaded Wild Man, their constant terror. They had lost men by his hand, in the passes and on the prairie, but now he had found his way to their secret haunt. The villains stood aghast with horror, for they shared the mysterious fear of all who had heard of this dreadful being. There had been no pursuit, for not one man among them dared lead in chase of the dreaded Wild Man.

"Ha!" said the chief. "Are the Brothers of the Eagle cowards, that they see the blood of a friend, and do nothing to help him or avenge him?"

"What can we do, Red Raven?" replied one of the men, in a sullen tone.

"Pursue the Wild Man, as with the wings of the eagle. Hunt him down among the rocks and drink his blood."

"That's easy said," answered the man. "But, who will lead?"

"I will; I, the Red Raven of the Pawnees! I, the friend of Rocky Ben, King of the Mountains."

"We'll follow you," cried the band. "You may depend upon us."

"Torches, then," said Red Raven. "Let a great warrior show you which way to turn your steps."

A score of torches were prepared, and taking one in his left hand and holding a bared hatchet in the other, the search began.

They showed him the place where the slain

man had been lying, and the huge track in the dust upon the floor, and the Indian at once started off at a hasty step, followed by the band. Rocky Ben was not present, or he would not have suffered the Indian to go faster or more forward than he in any desperate enterprise.

The tracks led them into passages never before explored, by subterranean waterfalls, under festoons of stalactite, hanging like drapery from the high walls. But the trail suddenly ceased—so suddenly that the Indian was at fault, and paused with a look of rage upon his face.

"The Bad Spirit of the Hills is in the creature," he said. "Where is the trail?"

Red Raven was not the man to give up easily, and he ran up and down the long galleries in a vain attempt to recover the trail, while the white men looked at one another in silent inquiry, not unmixed with dread.

"Where are your prisoners?" he said. "Perhaps they had something to do with this."

"No—no, they are safe," replied one of the men.

"Have you seen them since the sun rose?" demanded the chief.

"No; but the door is locked, and they can't get out."

"Let us return," said the Raven, briefly, "and then we shall see."

They hurried back to the main cavern, and one of the band who had the key flung open the door of the prison and entered, followed by several others, the Red Raven among the rest. To their utter surprise the room was empty, although to all appearance in the same situation in which they had left it.

"By the imps of Satan!" roared Albert Lawson, "Rocky Ben will have the life of somebody for this. Where is the key to the room where the women stay?"

"I don't see how they could help these men to escape."

They were staring stupidly about, trying to find some clue to this strange escape, when Rocky Ben came upon them. His eyes were blazing fiercely through the visor of his mask, and his hands, white and smooth as those of a woman, opened and shut themselves convulsively as he came on.

"What is this I hear?" he asked, savagely. "Recreant to your oaths, have you suffered them to escape?"

"We ain't to blame," replied one of the men. "The door ain't been opened since you went away, and I calculate we didn't expect them to go through the solid wall."

"Who was the guard?"

"Richards, No. 3."

"Ah, Richards, No. 3, step forward. You were placed here on guard last night, and ordered to see that no one passed out or in. Did you do so?"

"Yes, captain," replied the man, slowly.

"Are you certain that no one passed you?"

"Captain, I am ready for the test. I never closed my eyes through my watch. I carried in some food to the prisoners, and when they had finished, I went in and took away the dishes. When I came out, the gentleman was writing at the desk, and Pete was lying on the straw mat-

tering to himself. After that I locked the door, and took the key to the lieutenant."

"Where was Ida?"

"In her room; she ain't been out to-night."

"You tell your story well, sir. But that I have good reason to believe that you all wish for the death of these spies, I should be inclined to believe they had help from the outside. Surely they have not been able to pass the guard at the door, for they have not the word."

"I don't think they could get out. I believe they must be hidden somewhere in the cave," said Lawson.

"That is it. There are doubtless many passages of which we know nothing, and in some of these they lie concealed. Search everywhere then, and if you cannot find them, set a guard at all the entrances, and let them starve, as they deserve to do. Hunger and thirst will drive them out at last, and they must fall into our hands."

"We have searched everywhere," said Red Raven, "and they cannot be found. The Wild Man has been here, and Shelton is dead."

"Ha!" screamed Rocky Ben, wildly. "Say you so? How has that accursed creature entered this cave? By Heaven! he has either slain our prisoners or set them free. Away, Albert, and do as you are bid!"

The guards were set, and the entrance to the cave was sealed against the escaped prisoners.

CHAPTER X.

A HEAVY BLOW.

HAVING taken this precaution, the only one he could take under the circumstances, the captain turned back and rapped at the door of the room in which his mysterious prisoner was confined. She was seated at a table reading by the light of a lamp. The room was furnished neatly and almost luxuriously, and an evident desire to make her as comfortable as possible appeared in everything around. She rose at his entrance, then, with a look of scornful impatience upon her fair face.

"Why do you come here?" she said. "I have bowed to my fate; I remain your prisoner, but I will do no more."

"I would not have it so, Aline," he said, in a soft, melodious voice. "So far from any desire to make your residence irksome to you, I love you tenderly, you know that I love you."

"True love never harms its object. You have wronged me in every way, torn me from my home, by violence, in the dead of night, transported me over rivers and plains to this desolate place, and now hold me against my will. If my father lives, my father who loved me so well, how he must grieve for me."

"You shall return to him," he cried, eagerly. "Once my wife, I will take you wherever you choose to go, and I will strive by mute observance, by anticipating your every wish, to teach you to love me."

"You can never do that," she said. "I can only think of you with horror, for I think of that midnight assault, the flames of my father's dwelling, and the fierce band who surrounded me. I remember that my father fell dead, wounded by your hand, and until I know that he lives, I shall not cease to hate you."

Ben set his teeth so hard that their grating could be distinctly heard. He had schooled himself to be calm, had determined to endeavor to win her by kind words, but she was so haughty, and looked at him with such fierce scorn, that his wild temper was severely tried.

"You do not know in what danger you are," he cried, "a danger beyond anything you can conceive, when you speak to me in that manner. I have heard whispering among the men, since they saw your face, and they are angry that I should claim you. Perhaps it may happen that I shall be forced to give you up to them, and if I do, God pity you."

"Listen to me, Captain Ben," she said, in a harsh, strained voice, which sounded strangely unlike her previous mellow tone. "I am of a race to whom honor is more than a mere name, and if you drive me to it, I can find a way to die, and I will do it sooner than permit any infamous designs to triumph."

"I do not seek to drive you to this, as you know, and I would be the first to shoot down any man who dared insult you, by thought, word or deed. But it will be a struggle, and perhaps I shall go down in it, as I will, sooner than give you up to them."

"You have some attributes which are noble, Captain Ben, and with other women perhaps they might be successful. Do not fear for me, for I shall find a means to save myself from dishonor. Let me entreat you to think of all this as a wicked dream; take me back to my home, and then in other lands repent the evil you have done."

"That is the point where I have not the power to yield. I have worked with this object in view for years, and now you ask me to throw all aside, and begin anew my life. If I loved you less, I might listen to you, but as it is, I cannot."

"There is no need of further talk between us, then. My purpose is as unchanging and immovable as these great mountains under which I am a prisoner. I would like to ask you one question, about those unfortunate but gallant men who tried to save me—are they dead?"

"Not yet; but they will be soon."

"Why not set them free?"

"Because I know that you have been taken from any desire to you, I love the face of that young artist hunter, a curse upon him! But, be certain of this, you have loved him. You have looked your last upon him."

"What right have you to speak to me in that manner? I never saw his face before, doubtless I never shall again, but I should at least be glad to thank him for his gallant attempt."

"Consider it done. I will carry your thanks him in a way he will not like. As for you, you shall, or break."

At the door he met Ida, who looked at him with a keen, questioning glance, and he seized her by the arm.

"Hark you, girl, what had you to do with the escape of these men?"

"I, sir?" she cried, in well-acted surprise. "You! What had you to do with it, for I believe you were interested in it, in some manner?"

"Really, captain, you do me too much honor,"

she said. "I would have gladly set them free if I could, but will you kindly explain *how* I could do it?"

Ida saw that he did not *know* what share she had in the escape, but merely suspected it, and took upon herself an air of injured innocence which was very amusing. Ben was nonplused, and, although he still suspected her, he had no real ground for his doubt.

"I warn you, my lady. Do not let me catch you at treachery, for if I do you shall suffer. Where were you going?"

"I wish to speak to the lady and see to her room."

"I doubt whether any good can come of your being together, but go in, go in; and beware of me!"

"Yes, captain," said Ida, demurely. "I will do so."

"There is nothing to be made out of that provoking little devil," he muttered, "but I suspect her, and she shall not go unwatched. We shall see."

Ida rapped at the door, and the lady, who was permitted to have a key, opened the door and admitted her.

"I am glad to see you, Ida," she said; "we are partners in misfortune, and should sustain each other. Do you know anything of the brave men who tried to set me free?"

"Yes; be careful not to speak too loud. They are in a place of safety, although they cannot escape from the cave. I found a way to help them out of their cell last night, and now I am studying how to get food for them."

"My dear girl, you have lifted a load from my mind. Where are they?"

"In another section of the cave, which runs parallel to this. I found it out by accident in one of my rambles under the earth, and made use of it to save them. But, how shall we get them out of the cave?"

"I don't know, Ida. Cooped up here as I am, I can study out no plan. They must escape."

"Peter says he will not go without me, *us* I mean, and Mr. Grandison says the same. If they escape, so must we."

"Do not deceive me, Ida," cried Aline, eagerly. "Is there any hope of escape?"

"I think so. If they can get away, so can we, if you can make an excuse to get to my room."

"Yes, yes. Anything to escape from this horrible den."

"If you could pretend to be a little less hard on the captain, perhaps he would give you greater freedom."

"Oh, I could not do that."

"Anything to escape, Miss Aline. All is fair in love and war."

"I will try," said Aline, smiling, "but I fear that I shall be but a poor hand at such deception, for I hate this Captain Ben as I hate a serpent. He has wronged me in a way which merits no sympathy from me, and I fear I can not counterfeit regard for him."

"No matter for that; do your best, and I have no fear but you will succeed. At least we can only fail. I think I had better leave you, after I have set the room to rights, and then, as

soon as you can, send for Captain Ben and try your power."

Ida moved quickly about, set the room in order, and, with a look of meaning in her face, moved out of the room and closed the door. Albert, the man who claimed her as his own, met her outside, but she refused to speak with him, and he fell back with a muttered oath.

"You see that, boys," he said. "Captain Ben has lost all power here, beaten by a silly girl. It is time we made a change."

This was addressed in a low tone to several of the men, but not so low that Ida did not hear it or note the manner in which the men received it, although she made no sign to indicate that she paid any attention; but her mind was busy, nevertheless.

"Aha, Monsieur Albert!" she thought. "So you are studying treachery, are you? Patience, and see if some good does not come out of this."

She entered her room and closed the door, locking it carefully. From a rude cupboard in one corner, she took out a platter containing a large piece of cold roast venison, and from another compartment a bottle containing wine. A calico screen was stretched in front of her bed, and taking these articles, she disappeared behind it, and remained there. This strange proceeding required explanation certainly, for she did not reappear, until half-an-hour had passed; then she emerged from behind the curtain, carrying the empty platter. If she had devoured the meat herself, she was possessed of gastronomic powers beyond anything yet heard of, but it was gone, and she knew where.

She sat down panting slightly, but with a merry look upon her face, listening intently. There came a soft rap at the door, and she opened it to admit Aline, and locked it behind her, and they sat down on the bed, side by side, and joined hands girl-fashion.

"Well?" said Aline, in a questioning tone.

"I have seen them," replied Ida.

"Are they in good spirits?"

"As good as could be expected. We must act to-night."

"I am eager to go. What would Rocky Ben do, if he found us out? I fear to think of it. Do you know what he intends to do to-day?"

"The scouts report a large armed body of mountain-men encamped on the prairie, about four miles to the south. He will send Albert to find out what they aim at, and goes himself upon another expedition. I am going now to meet the Red Raven, for I hope to have his aid in escaping."

"The Red Raven! You forget that he has an almost idolatrous affection for Rocky Ben."

"No doubt you are right. He does love Rocky Ben, and will fight for him to the death, but he will aid me all the same if he can do it without betraying himself to Rocky Ben. In the mean time, perhaps you had better go back to your room and wait until after supper and then come to me."

They left the room together, but parted at the door, and Ida approached Red Raven, who was seated upon a rock quite alone, mending the handle of his hatchet. His fine face lighted up at her approach, and he saluted her with a

courtly grace which would have done credit to one of the knights of old.

"The Flower of the Delawares is welcome," he said. "If there is anything Red Raven can do for her, let her speak; his ears are open."

"I pine for the hills and streams where the Delawares dwell," she said. "I am sick of this dark place and would return to my people."

"The heart of the Red Raven has been sad sometimes when he has beheld the grief of the Delaware maiden," replied the chief. "But he is a friend of Rocky Ben, and loves him because his arm is strong, and his heart brave. How can I be a traitor to him, and take away the prize he has won?"

"Rocky Ben does not care for me," she replied. "He brought me here that I might be the servant of his prisoner and do her bidding. She is very beautiful, and I love her and would save her if I could."

"It is true," replied Red Raven, "and the leaves of the Lily wither in her dark prison. Red Raven would do much to set her free, but how can he be a traitor to Rocky Ben?"

"I only ask that the chief shall close his eyes and not watch what is done to-night."

A look of meaning came into the eyes of the chief.

"It is well," he said. "The Red Raven is very blind. Listen; where are the prisoners of Captain Ben? Have they sunk into the earth. You know where they are hidden?"

"Yes."

"And will you tell me?"

"If you wish to know. But, is it not better that you should not?" she replied.

"Ida has the head of a wise man. It is no good that I should know, and I will say no more but if, when I come back from the scout, I do not find you here, the heart of Red Raven will be sad to lose you, but he will be glad that you have gone back to the homes of your people."

He turned to his work, and his hand did not tremble as he labored, nor his eye grow moist. Although he was so calm outwardly, there was a tempest raging within, for the proud chief loved Ida devotedly, and would have periled his life to save hers.

Ida knew that Red Raven loved her, and she had enough Indian blood in her veins not to look upon his love as an insult, and to feel for him in his sorrow, and admire the fortitude with which he kept it a secret. He still sat on the rock, working at his weapon, and covertly watching Ida as she passed on, until he saw he met Albert Lawson.

"Look you, my girl," said the outlaw. "I am going out upon duty now, and I can't attend to the work I had in view. But, let me tell you that when I return there must be an end of all this."

"Move out of my way," replied Ida. "I do not wish to talk with you."

"Do you dare speak to me in that manner?" he hissed. "I'll make you repent it before three days have passed over your head. You can find plenty of time to speak with yonder greasy savage, but you have none to speak with a gentleman."

She attempted to pass him, but he put out his arm and seized her roughly—so roughly, in-

deed, as to draw from her a cry of pain. Scarcely had he done so when there came the rush of a heavy body, a sounding blow, and something dropped upon the stone floor of the cavern quite heavily. When he recovered sufficiently to understand, Master Albert realized that he was lying upon his back, with a bloody pate, and over him stood the tall form of Red Raven, shaking his gleaming hatchet before his eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

"SEIZE THEM!"

MEANTIME Rocky Ben had left the cave, in company with the greater portion of the band, though the men did not accompany him out the passes. Near the place where the young artist had found the body of the first man slain the Wild Man, they halted, and Albert stripped off his mask and stood before them, a dark-floored, heavily-bearded man with a sinister and sensual lips. He did not remain with the party, but throwing off everything which would imply a connection with the Brothers of the Eagle, he rode away at a brisk pace down the prairie, and was soon lost to their view. The captain remained for a few moments in close conversation with his second lieutenant, and then the band dismounted in the *debouchure* of the canyon, which, at this point, was fifty or sixty feet wide, and fastened their horses by means of their lariats, while the men lounged about in groups, and chatted with one another, though they kept their weapons near them. Two hours passed away, and suddenly they heard coming hoofs, and up dashed Albert, his horse in a foam.

"All right, captain," he said. "They are a party of seven who have been to a cache they made last winter, and are bringing in peltries. It will be a good haul."

"Mount!" cried the leader, turning to the men. The outlaws were instantly in the saddle. "Fall in; close up; trot!" and they were off with a precision and training which did credit to the military skill of Captain Ben. Away they went across the broad plain at a rapid trot, and after a ride of half an hour they came across the last roll of the prairie and entered a point of peninsula formed by a bend in the river, and found the party of whom they were in search—a band of free trappers, who had been thinking too freely to keep good watch. Up they sprang, rifles in hand, at the sight of that ominous company with their somber masks, before they had time to use a weapon, Captain Ben raised his hand and shouted:

"Down with your arms! Dare to lift a hand and your lives shall pay the forfeit of your foolishness."

They hesitated and were lost, for the torrent poured in upon them and bore them down before it. In ten minutes the fruits of a toilsome winter's work, in storm and snow, were torn away from them, and they were left with only their weapons and their lives.

"Go out again next winter, boys, and work for Captain Ben," said the leader, jeeringly. "You have done well this time. Where is Bolton?"

"Here, captain," said one of the men.

"You will remove your mask and ride down to the place where these men are camped and endeavor to find out what their object is. Having done so, shake them off as soon as you can, and return to us. Go."

The Brothers of the Eagle had been trained to perfect obedience. No sooner was the command spoken when Bolton tore off his mask, and, thrusting it into his bosom, turned his horse's head to the east. The rest of the band kept on their course up the canyon and entered at the secret portal, which closed behind them. The horses were stabled in a large vaulted room which had been fitted up for that purpose, and the band made their way to the main cavern.

"Send Fletcher to me," said Rocky Ben.

The person sent for came at once—a wiry, compactly-built man, with a keen and crafty eye, which flashed through the visor of his mask like stars.

"Where are they, Fletcher?"

"They are both in Ida's room at present," replied Fletcher. "At least, they went there at five o'clock, and neither of them have showed themselves since."

"Very good. You will come with me and see if you cannot ferret out the plans of that sharp girl."

Ben rapped at the door of Ida's room, but no answer was returned. He rattled the door, but only the echoes answered him. The outlaw kept keys of all the doors, and, selecting the right one from the bunch, he fitted it to the lock and entered. The room was empty and he uttered a wild cry of rage.

"Captain!" cried Fletcher, appalled by his superior's savage glance. "As I respect my oath I have never taken my eyes from that door since your prisoner entered, and I know she has not come out."

"I believe you, Fletcher," said the captain, sternly. "If I did not, I would shoot you down in your tracks. Enough of this; there is some other avenue of escape from this room, of which we know nothing. Order in the men, and we will find it."

The men came pouring in at the command, and the small room was crowded with masked faces. "Take hold here and move this bed," cried Captain Ben, tearing down the curtain. "Doubtless it conceals the mode of escape."

Four men lifted the light bed aside and showed the ragged wall of the cavern.

"Bring a bar here," said Ben, with his eye upon the wall. "I begin to suspect something."

A bar of iron was passed over to him, and, clearing a space for work, he struck it against the stone. It gave back a hollow sound, but stood firm.

"There is a passage behind this wall," he said, "and these girls have found it. That infernal half-breed has done this."

He struck again and again upon the wall, until the bar touched a spot which trembled under the blow. He struck again; a loose stone fell out, and the men set to work with their bare hands, picking out the stones, until a passage was cleared, showing an open space beyond.

"I thought so," said Ben. "That cunning

girl has deceived us all, Albert, and when we find her, I will suffer no man to stand between you and her."

"Not even Red Raven?" demanded the lieutenant, eagerly. "Say that, and I am with you heart and soul."

"Not even Red Raven. What right has he to interfere in my plans? Go to my room Fletcher, and bring my lantern, the one with the slide. We must explore this place."

The lantern was soon brought, lighted, and turning on a dim light, Captain Ben led the way, closely followed by a dozen of the more resolute men of the party. They found in the dust of centuries the tracks of small feet, and knew that the girls had preceded them some time before. But how far had they gone, and was there another outlet to the cave? The track grew plainer as they proceeded in utter silence, until they saw, far off, the light of a torch shining through the gloom.

"Douse the glim, captain," whispered Albert "and let us steal upon them unawares. There they are, curse them."

"Yes, and those rascally prisoners of ours with them. They will soon be in our power, and then they are—"

He left the sentence unfinished, but there was a meaning in his tone which was fearful. They crept on over the scattered rocks, feeling their way toward their victims with great caution, eager as bloodhounds with the quarry in sight.

It was indeed the two girls and the men Ida had rescued, waiting a favorable opportunity for escape. They had explored the passages for some distance, but they seemed interminable, and they were seated upon the rocks, conversing eagerly as to the chances of escape.

"Now see hyer," said Pete. "That strange critter we call the Wild Man got in somewhar, and whar he got in, we kin git out. My idea is, to hunt for his sign, and then foller it, no matter whar it leads us, and in my opinion it will take us cl'ar out of this."

"Your plan is a good one, Pete," said Ethelbert, "and will succeed if any plan will. For myself I do not care, but these ladies are in our charge and we must save them."

"Seize them!" cried the voice of Rocky Ben. "Take those men alive if you can, dead if you must. Down with them!"

They were again in the power of their mortal enemy.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE DEATH POOL.

THE two men fought desperately, but having no weapons, they were overpowered after two or three of their assailants had fallen under their heavy blows. Ida faced Albert with a drawn dagger and wounded him twice although not severely, before she was disarmed and held captive in his fierce clasp.

"Coward, lost to shame and manhood, unhand me! Do you see this, Captain Ben? Do you suffer your men to insult a woman by holding her with their felon hands?"

"You have brought it on yourself, my lady," said the captain. "I told you to beware of me if I caught you tripping, and I have promised

my lieutenant not to interfere between him and you."

"Beware of the Red Raven! He is your friend now, but he will be your enemy if you dare to insult me."

"Red Raven dare not interfere between me and my prisoners."

"Be quiet, you cat," hissed Albert, "or I shall tie your hands."

"Better give it up, Ida," said Pete sadly. "It's my luck, I s'pose, and I can't fight ag'in' it. But ef that black devil hez got the heart of a man in his bosom he'll fight it out with me, no matter with what weapons, here and now."

"Thank you, Pete. I should be a fool to fight you, when I have the game in my own hands."

"Then ye ar' what the gal called ye a coward, and no mountain-man. Say what ye will, it's a dog's death you'll meet at last. You orter to be kicked to death by a buffler-calf. I did think you chaps hed some little pluck, but I give it up."

"Here, Captain Ben," shrieked Albert. "Give me this man, to kill as I like. I demand it as a right."

"No; I have other plans for him," said Ben. "If his tongue wags too much, cut it out; but he must wait my time to die."

"Must! That is a hard word to use to a mountain-man," said Pete. "You low-lived skunks, a man kin only die onc't, and I'll die with my teeth set, see ef I don't. Enuff said; take us whar you like."

Rocky Ben had not suffered another man to touch his captive, and stood, during this dialogue, with her hand tightly clasped in his, looking at her even while he spoke to the others. Now, drooping like a flower cut down, she would have fallen to the earth, but the captain passed his arm about her, and held her up.

"Back to the cavern home," he said. "Death of my life, men, don't you see she is fainting?"

They hurried back, the captain carrying the insensible form of Aline, Albert following, half-leading, half-dragging Ida, who was not a dead weight on his hands, Fletcher going before with the lantern.

The prisoners were thrust into their old quarters, but so heavily ironed that they could neither move hand nor foot, and left to pass the weary hours of the night.

"Bring water here!" cried Rocky Ben. "If she is dead, if I have killed her, then all this tissue of crime has been in vain. Curse you, why don't you hurry? Water, water!"

He sat down upon the hard stone floor and laid the golden head in his lap, while one of the men brought water, with which he laved her forehead and hands. The touch of the pure element revived her, and she came back to consciousness with a gasping sigh.

"Where am I? What has happened? Ah, I know now. Have you killed him, Captain Ben? If you have, may your wickedness find you out at last!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"You know—the young artist, Grandison."

"No, Aline; he is not dead yet, and it remains with you to say whether he shall live or die."

"With me?"

"Yes. If you will yield now, I promise not only to save his life, but to set him free, together with Pete Burns and Ida."

"What shall I do—what shall I do? Do not put their destiny upon me, for it is more than I can bear."

"Listen, girl," said Rocky Ben, hoarsely, lifting her to her feet. "This is the last chance I shall give you. Embrace it while you have the opportunity, for it will not come to you again. Come this way."

He led her to the room set apart for her, and there released her.

"You love this man?" he said, in the same hoarse voice; "speak quickly!"

"I have no right to love him," replied Aline, boldly, "and yet he is a man worthy of love. He is a hero, a man of honor and a pure heart, which you cannot claim."

"You love him! You have spoken his doom with your own lips. If you had said you did not care for him, I might yet have saved him; but now—now his fate is sealed."

"Can you shed innocent blood? Man, of what are you framed? This young man has never told me that he loves me—doubtless loves another, and it is probable that I shall never see his face again."

"You may be right," he said. "I will see him and hear from his own lips whether he has been able to withstand that too lovely face. If he has not, woe to him and to you!"

He strode out of the apartment, and the poor girl fell face downward on the couch, struggling with her heart. If her love had been a plant of quick growth, it was not the less strong and true. She loved Ethelbert already with all the devotion of a passionate nature. His eyes had told her a story which at another time it would have been a joy to read, and she feared that he loved her, and would not deny it to Rocky Ben.

The captain strode quickly through the dark passages until he entered the room of the prisoners. Ethelbert rose to a sitting posture, his irons rattling as he did so, and faced the intruder.

"Why do you come here?" he said. "I am trying to make my peace with God, since I am to die so soon."

"I have come to ask you a single question," replied Rocky Ben.

"Your question, then."

"Do you love my prisoner, the girl for whose sake you are made captive? Pause before you answer, for much depends upon it."

"I shall not hesitate long to answer that question. I am a captive for her sake and die gladly, knowing that I perish for the most beautiful woman that I ever beheld. Are you answered?"

"Yes; you have sealed your death-warrant. And, since you say it is easy to die for a worthy object, I will tell you one thing more. She loves you, and is in agony for your sake. Her agony shall be greater, for she shall see your death, and then she is mine forever. Good-night."

Morning came—the last morning they could hope to see on earth, and these brave men were led forth to die. The dark portal opened,

and the savage band rode out with their prisoners in the center. Aline was riding by the side of Rocky Ben, and Ida by Albert. They had given over useless entreaties for the lives of their lovers, and had nerved themselves to witness their death.

"This is fearful," whispered Aline. "Let me go back. Captain Ben, I cannot see them die."

"Do you yield?" demanded Ben.

"I cannot."

"Then say no more; you shall see how I can avenge myself."

They rode out of the pass and turned toward the river. At this point an eddy had worn out a deep dark pool, the bottom of which could not be seen. The banks were screened by overhanging bushes of a species of alder.

Rocky Ben dismounted, and gave a signal to his men, and they seized and bound the prisoners hand and foot.

"Now," said Ben. "Are you ready to die?"

"Yes," said Ethelbert, "if you are cruel enough to slay us. Will you let me speak a few words to yonder lady?"

"I give you ten minutes. Fall back, men, and give him room. Pete Burns, you have permission to speak to Ida."

The girls touched their horses, and rode close to the two doomed adventurers.

"Lady," said Ethelbert, "I have come to the end of the road. It has been a hard, adventurous life, and I have faced dangers, but until I saw your face I never knew what it was to love. It might be presumption in me at any other time to tell you this, but now, in the face of death, I may say it. I am proud to love you, proud to die for you. If I could have lived, and have met you in other scenes than these, I would have done anything to win your affections and possess your heart. Even now, it would give me a better heart to meet death, if I knew that you loved me."

"Hush, hush," she whispered, softly. "You know that I love you."

The face of the young artist seemed suddenly to become glorified, and he raised his bound hands to heaven.

"You have given all I dared to hope for, Aline. In yonder land beyond the distant blue, I shall see and claim you for my own. Will you kiss me?—it is as though you kissed the dead."

She bent in the saddle, and he pressed his lips to hers fervently.

"Death and destruction!" cried the captain. "Separate them, and let us end all this."

"Good-by, my darling," cried Ethelbert, as they dragged him away. "Remember me tenderly, and all shall be well with us in the next world."

Ida was clinging to the neck of her lover, and Albert dragged them asunder with a bitter oath. They bound the two back to back, and fastened a huge stone in a blanket to sink them, and Aline understood the death they had before them.

"No, no, no; not that death. Oh, Captain Ben, if there is in your heart anything of the tenderness you have claimed for me, do not drown them."

"Away! He shall die with your kiss warm upon his lips and you shall know what a thing it

is to insult Rocky Ben. I have chosen this death, and they shall meet it."

"Waste no time in idle prayers, Aline," said Ethelbert. "We are ready."

"Will you not beg for your life?"

"Not I."

"Nor you, Pete Burns?"

"I've got other business, and ef a man kin come back to haant another, I'll haant you. Do your worst, I'm ready."

"Mount," said Rocky Ben. All the men except four leaped into the saddle. These men stooped, and, by a mighty effort, lifted the bound men and hurled them into the deep pool. A wild scream broke from the lips of the two girls as the clustering locks and coal-black hair of the victims floated for a moment on the water, and then the dark flood closed over them.

"It is done," cried Rocky Ben. "Fall in; file right; march!"

The horrible crime was accomplished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AVENGING FATE.

ROCKY BEN glanced uneasily at the face of his companion as he rode back. It seemed suddenly turned to stone. Aline made no answer to his words.

"Why don't you speak?" he hissed. "Do you think I have lost my soul for this, mad girl? Away with indecision on my part from this hour! To-day we break up the camp here and seek a new home. You must go with me as my wife."

At this moment Red Raven joined them at a mad gallop. His quick eye roved over the band, and he saw that the deed had been done, and the unhappy prisoners were no more upon earth, whom he had followed, in the vain hope to save.

"What news?" cried the captain.

"Danger," replied Red Raven. "A dark cloud hangs over the Brothers of the Eagle."

"What mean you?"

"Look out upon the plain and you will see."

The captain looked and saw a large body of men between him and the pass, coming down at a rapid trot, riding as only mountaineers and prairie-men can ride. He was in the toils and must fight!

"Brace yourselves, my men!" he shouted. "This is the band of trappers I told you of. It is victory or death with us, for these men will neither give nor ask quarter. Cut through them and gain the cave, and there we can defy them."

"What shall be done with the women?"

"Five of you take them, and when we are in the thick of it, make a circuit and get to the pass. Are you ready, men? Then charge?"

The new-comers greeted them with fierce cries and spurred their horses, eager to meet the shock. The outlaws were not less ready, and the two companies clashed together with savage earnestness.

The Brothers of the Eagle were outnumbered, two to one, and although they fought with all the energy of despair, they dropped one by one under the deadly weapons of their adversaries. Rocky Ben saw that all was lost. Looking out upon the plain, he saw that those he had commissioned to take charge of Aline and Ida had

managed to make the required circuit, and were nearly a mile in the rear, seated upon their horses awaiting the issue of the fight.

"Break through, boys," cried Ben. "It must be done."

They made a last desperate rush, and succeeded in their effort, scattering their assailants right and left, and were away over the plain, gaining two hundred yards before the others started in pursuit. Of all the band that went out that morning to the murder of Grandison and Burns, only two were on their feet, and those were the two leaders. Red Raven, who had taken no part in that crime, had also escaped. All were admirably mounted, and it was soon evident that they were likely to escape. But goading their horses with knife-point and spur, their enemies kept up the pursuit. As they came near the women, Ben made signals to the men to hurry forward, and they obeyed, forcing the unwilling girls along with them. They entered the pass with the white men and the Indian thundering in the rear, distant about three hundred yards, and the pursuers not far behind them, when there started up in the narrowest part of the pass three ghastly figures, at the sight of which the five men who guarded Ida and Aline left their horses, and scrambled up the rocky sides of the pass in desperate haste.

Who were they? Ethelbert Grandison and Peter Burns, with the water dripping from their hair and clothing, and the strange being known as the Wild Man of the Hills! The place where they stood was barely ten feet wide, and each one held his place firmly, facing the two girls, who urged their horses and passed them, just as Rocky Ben and Albert made their appearance in the pass. They saw the forms of the men they had murdered, and knew that Peter Burns had kept his promise to haunt them if he had the power. A cold chill crept through the bones of these wicked men, and, forgetting all else, they two sought to escape by the same course taken by the guards of Aline. But they had hesitated too long, and half a dozen rifles cracked. Albert dropped dead upon the ledge which he had reached, but Ben, clutching vainly at empty space, rolled down to the bottom of the glen and lay gasping as the trappers came up.

"Here, Aline, here," cried the voice of Ethelbert Grandison. "You are saved, and God grant us many, many happy days."

"And us too, Ida," shouted Big Pete.

In an instant each held the woman he loved best in his arms, while many a rough borderman turned away his head to hide the suspicious moisture in his eyes. Neddy Forrester came up to shake the hand of Grandison and greet his old friend, and Watkins came with him, and there was a scene of mutual congratulation. During all this time the Wild Man had made no effort to escape, but sat in a musing attitude upon a great stone, with his hands clasped upon the great club he always carried.

"This is a time for explanation, Ethelbert," said Aline, withdrawing herself blushing from her lover's arms. "There, sir, be careful what you do. How were you saved? Who saved you?"

"This strange being," replied the artist, pointing to the Wild Man. "He was concealed in

the reeds on the river-bank, and the moment the band turned he plunged in and relieved us from our dangerous predicament and led us here, happily in time to meet you."

"I will now tell you how I came to be a prisoner among these men," spoke Aline. "Over two years ago I lived in Kansas, with my father and mother. My father was an Englishman, Birdsall by name, who had brought a large fortune to his western home to help build up a great State. The house was attacked at night by ruffians, and I was carried away, as I afterward found, by Rocky Ben. What his motive was in wishing to make me his wife, I do not know, but he swore to me that I should marry him, or never leave the mountain cave. He has kept me a close prisoner ever since."

The Wild Man inclined his ear and seemed to listen.

"And what became of your father?"

"I have never been certain whether he died that night or escaped."

"He died," shrieked the wounded man lying at their feet. "I killed him—I, Ben Birdsall, his nephew!"

"It is false," cried a deep voice. "You killed him not!"

All turned in surprise, and saw that the Wild Man was on his feet. Raising his hand to his head he tore off the hairy covering which enveloped it, and revealed the face of a man of middle age, with a haughty eye and firm lips. Aline gave one cry of surprise and joy, and was enfolded in his arms.

"My darling child! At last, at last, I have you, saved from the vile man in whose veins flows the same blood as mine. Benjamin, the crimes of your ill-spent life have found you out, and you lie here, dying at my feet."

"Peace," commanded Red Raven, extending his hand. "Let the words of my brother be soft to one who is dying."

"No soft words for me," replied Rocky Ben. "I strove for a great stake and failed. Arthur Birdsall, your brother's great estate waits for you in England, and I would have married your daughter to obtain it. But when I saw her, I loved her, and have periled my soul for love. Dig my grave where I lie, and if you place a stone above it, I curse you with my dying breath."

And with these bitter words upon his lips, Rocky Ben died.

They did not wait long in the pass, but the whole band hurried on to the cave, which was opened to them at the password of which the escaped prisoners had obtained the clew upon the day when they were captured. The few robbers left in the cave were quickly overpowered and made prisoners, and the treasures heaped up during years of rapine and murder were the prey of the victors. That night, when a fire was lighted in the great central cave, the reunited lovers sat and listened to the story of Mr. Birdsall.

"Upon that bloody night when you were made a prisoner and your mother fell a victim to the rage of these savage men, led by Benjamin Birdsall, I was left for dead, struck down by his murderous hand. I lived, and registered an oath in heaven to track him down and mete out ven-

geance to him. I have traversed this region through and through during the last year, vainly seeking for some clew, and it was only six months ago that I became certain of the identity of Rocky Ben. You must understand that his band sprung up on the confines of Kansas, and that upon the body of a man killed by me in self-defense enough was found to make me certain that his was the band that robbed me of all I loved. He left Kansas after this outrage, and sought the Rocky Mountains. Here he has lived since, preying like a vulture on his kind and keeping my child a prisoner. I might have killed him long ago if I had been certain whether Aline was alive or dead, but until I was certain, I was forced to spare him. For the murder of my dear wife I have taken signal vengeance, for not one who wore his accursed livery have I spared. My wife is amply revenged now.

"I took upon myself the strange garb I wore, which I made from the skin of a grizzly bear, partly as a disguise and partly to protect myself from the inclemency of the seasons in the mountains. I have worn it until my name has become a terror to these evil men, and in that disguise have I watched and waited, until I satisfied myself that Aline yet lived. My work is done, my mission is accomplished. I have walked through a deep sea of blood and trouble, but I have kept my oath.

"Last night I lay in wait and heard the two leading men of this vile band tell to each other the fate they had in store for the prisoners. They sat where I sit now, and I was—here."

He rose, and detaching a loose stone from the wall of the cavern, showed a narrow passage, just wide enough for a man to crawl through on his hands and knees.

"There are many passages leading from the main cave, so that a man may well despair who becomes entangled in the labyrinth. To-morrow we will explore the cave, and I will show our friends all its secrets. Ah! who have we here?"

"Aw, ba Jauvel! Suahly this is not Mr. Birdsall?" said a familiar voice.

"You are a Featherby, or I am much mistaken."

"Yaas, yaas," replied the Honorable Oscar, who had joined himself to the band of trappers, kept judiciously out of the fight, and came up when all danger was over. "Do yah know that the lawyahs looked for you all ovah Europe and Amewica? Your brothah is dead and no one can claim the estate except yourself."

"That explains it. This Captain Bird, or Rocky Ben, as he was called, was the son of a younger brother of mine, a wild, graceless boy, a dissolute young man and a villain at heart. How long has the estate been begging for an owner?"

"Foah years," answered Featherby.

"I left England five years ago, and no one except my younger brother knew where I was. He returned to England four years ago and died there soon after, doubtless telling no one except his son where to find me. The unfortunate man hunted me down to kill me and obtain the estate, and, to make assurance doubly sure, he would have married Aline. The measure of his guilt is full. May God forgive his wickedness on earth, and take him to his rest."

Many things were now explained which were mysteries before. Mr. Birdsall had shown himself to Watkins and Forrester in the central valley where they were waiting for Red Raven, and Featherby had at once taken flight. Birdsall told them who he was, and where the band of trappers were gathered, and sent them to hasten their steps. On the way down they had found the six trappers who had been robbed the day before, who readily joined them for revenge, and fought bravely.

One section of the cave was a perfect storehouse of peltries, the fruit of the last year's robbery, which had never been removed. These were divided among the trappers equitably. Mr. Birdsall and Ethelbert readily contributing their share as a wedding present to Ida and Big Pete Burns. Much money and bills were also found, and were divided in the same way. It was a profitable day's work to the mountaineers. The party remained for two days in that region, which Birdsall knew so well, and he showed them the scenes of his many exploits, and the cave where he had lived. Although he was now clothed in the garments of civilization, he retained the disguise which he had worn so long and packed it for transportation across the plains, when they were ready to set out.

Red Raven had disappeared after the burial of his friend, but when the party filed out of the pass on their return they found him standing on the plain awaiting them.

"White men," he said, as the long procession halted, "the heart of the chief is sad. Rocky Ben, who is dead, was a friend to Red Raven. He struck the warriors of the white men, and he died as a warrior should die at last. What hand is there among you kind enough to slay Red Raven upon the grave of his friend?"

"Speak to him, Ida," murmured Big Pete. "I can't."

"Chief," said Ida, advancing a little, "there are none so wicked here as to wish your death. You have never struck the innocent, and have defended the weak. You have taken no part in these wicked spoils and have been very, very kind to me."

"It is well," responded the chief. "The Flower of the Delawares will go into the lodge of Big Pete, who will be kind to her. And sometimes, when the fires burn and the night is dark, let her speak to her children of Red Raven, who loved their mother so well."

Before she could speak he was in his saddle, was away like the wind, and the main actors of this story never saw him more.

They halted long enough at the first settlement to see Big Pete Burns and Ida married, and then kept on to Kansas. Here Pete was able with the money he had gained to buy and stock a large farm in the vicinity of Atkinson. Watkins and Forrester did the same, and the three friends settled down to a quiet life, as compared with the one they had before led. The parting of Ida and Aline was a sad one; and when it was over they separated, and Mr. Birdsall and his daughter, with Ethelbert and Featherby in company, went to New York, and from thence to England by the same steamer, where Mr. Birdsall claimed his brother's estate, and the title deeds were given up to him at once,

A week after there was a grand wedding, and the two who loved each other so strangely were united for life.

Years have passed, during which Kansas has grown and prospered. Peter Burns, who had thrived during these years, was sitting in the evening sun before his door, with his wife beside him and Forrester and Watkins smoking their pipes while lying on the grass. Pete played with his pretty boy now nearly two years old, when a carriage drove rapidly up containing four persons—a gentleman of commanding presence, whose hair was growing gray, a younger man with a genial, sun-burned, handsome face, and a beautiful woman, holding in her arms a child about the age of the one on Pete's knee.

Pete looked at them, rubbed his eyes, looked again, and then gave utterance to a yell founded upon a Blackfoot war-whoop.

"Yah, hep—hi! Look at that, Ida! It's Grandison and his wife, and the Wild Man! Hurrah!"

"Yes, Pete," replied Grandison, as they clasped hands. "Here we are, all of us, come back to Kansas to live and die."

"You kiss him, Ida. Do it quick, darn it, do! Hurrah! Yip—hi! I could jump out of my skin, for joy. Here's Wat, too, and Neddy. Oh, Lord, if poor Featherbed was only here."

The joy of these faithful creatures was contagious, and if Ethelbert had not kissed Ida upon the spot he would have been less than human, and he did it with all his heart. Ida released herself blushing, and threw herself into Aline's arms—Aline, more beautiful in her young motherhood, than when Ida served her so faithfully in the cavern under the hills. The beautiful girl whom Aline so idolized bore the name of Ida, and Peter's boy was called Ethelbert.

"And you've come back to live in Kansas?" said Big Pete, when they were all seated. "By mortal snakes, we'll all go out to the Rockies and visit the cave, and hunt over the old places. But we won't take Featherbed; whar's he?"

"In London, where he was the rage for a long time, and he has written a book detailing his desperate encounters with Indians, robbers and wild beasts. We might have exposed him, but such notoriety is cheap, and we let it pass. Besides, there is really no harm in Featherby."

"Do you ever think of your two years' captivity now, Ida?" said Aline.

"Often; we talk about it at the winter fire."

"It is like a fevered dream to me, and I wake in terror at night, thinking I hear again the stern voice of Ben Birdsall, dooming our husbands to death. Oh dear father, what do we not owe to you!"

"I have forgiven Ben Birdsall," said the old man. "He is in his grave. But, have you ever heard of that noble Indian, Red Raven?"

"He is dead," answered Ida, and in the gathering twilight she told the story as she had heard it of the noble death of the chief.

They live in Kansas yet, holding up the arms of that strong young State, and striving to make her future more glorious than her past. Featherby is in the House of Commons, and is regarded as a mighty hunter by his associates.

THE END.

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